Identity-formation on YouTube

investigating audiovisual presentations of the self

Simonsen, Thomas Mosebo

Publication date:
2012

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

IDENTITY-FORMATION ON YOUTUBE

- Investigating audiovisual presentations of the self

Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities at Aalborg University,
Department of Communication and Psychology

February 2012

Written by:
Thomas Mosebo Simonsen

IDENTITY-FORMATION ON YOUTUBE

Investigating audiovisual presentations of the self

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the department of Communication and Psychology at the Faculty of Humanities at Aalborg University.

Aarhus, February 2012.

Supervisor: Tove Arendt Rasmussen.

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this dissertation has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution.

……..……..

Date Thomas mosebo Simonsen

Resume af afhandlingen:

Identity formation on YouTube - *Investigating audiovisual presentations of the self*
Af Thomas Mosebo Simonsen

Med fokusområde på YouTube præsenterer denne Ph.d.-afhandling en undersøgelse af audiovisuel og online identitetsdannelse. Det argumenteres, at mennesker gennem audiovisuel selv-præsentation kan skabe en autentisk, online konstruktion af subjektet og kommunikere denne som en autentisk medieret virkelighed i og omkring bruger-generet indhold på YouTube. Denne identitet kommer særligt til udtryk i første persons videoer, de såkaldte "Vlogs", som er det analytiske omdrejningspunkt i afhandlingen.

I undersøgelsen af hvordan de medierede selv-præsentationer kommer til udtryk på YouTube, tilskrives ikke mindst YouTubes kendetegn som medieplatform, en betydelig rolle for skabelsen af denne specifikke online identitet. YouTube analyseres derfor både som medie- og sociokulturelt fænomen, hvor det teoretiske fundament udgøres af et overrodnet "Medium Theory" perspektiv med fokus på YouTube som medieplatform, der samtidig diskuteres i lyset af de senere års tendenser omkring den såkaldte "Deltagerkultur" udsprunget af Cultural Studies traditionen. En teoretisk position udmønter sig på baggrund af disse tilgange i retning af den symbolske interaktionisme, hvorudfra konstruktionen af identitet analyseres. Det involverer i særdeleshed et fokus på social interaktion og sociale roller bl.a. udsprunget omkring George Herbert Meads (1934) tanker om selvet, som videreudvikles af Erving Goffman (1959) og endelig sættes ind i en medialiseret kontekst af Joshua Meyrowitz (1985), hvis teoretiske fundament afhandlingen diskuterer YouTube i lyset af.

Afhandlingen er opbygget omkring et empirisk studie af YouTube videoer, der metodisk har taget udgangspunkt i en "Content Analysis" inspireret tilgang, som samtidig kombineres med et fortolkende lag og en genre-analytisk tilgang. Det empiriske studie repræsenterer, i form af et observeret sample af YouTube videoer, et udsnit af YouTubes mest populære indhold, og afhandlingens hovedargumenter bliver således fremsat inden for denne kontekst.

Gennem den metodiske del og en typologisering af bruger-generet-indhold identificeres en gruppe af Vlogs, der i den efterfølgende analyse inddrages til at identificere og analysere de audiovisuelle identitetsdannelser på YouTube som primært ikke-fiktive tekster, og hvorledes fremstillingen af selvet i videoerne kommer til udtryk i forhold til social adfærd, og ikke mindst i forhold til indtrykket af autenticitet, som et gennemgående analytisk fokuspunkt i gennemgangen af social og performativ adfærd i YouTube videoerne.

Overordnet bidrager afhandlingen til en forståelse af audiovisuel identitet og social adfærd på nettet, hvor projekts ærinde også er at bidrage til en karakteristik af YouTube som sociokulturelt mediefænomen.

Ovenstående beskrives i en monografisk del, der inkluderer en metodisk del, centrale elementer af den teoretiske ramme samt en analytisk del. Hertil er der skrevet fire individuelle artikler, der afspejler og udbreder aspekter af projektet produceret løbende under udarbejdelsen af Ph.d.-afhandlingen.

……

Summary of the dissertation:

Identity formation on YouTube - *Investigating audiovisual presentations of the self*
By Thomas Mosebo Simonsen

This dissertation investigates the construction of online and mediated identity on YouTube. It is argued that audiovisual presentations of the self with user-generated content (UGC) are regarded as authentic identities that appear as extensions of the self that simultaneously are regarded and presented as reality. The construction of identity on YouTube is especially noticeable in specific modes of the UGC; the first-person presentations of the self, also referred to as "Vlogs", which thus will be the main analytical focus of this dissertation.

The project draws on an empirically based investigation of 900 YouTube videos, where a sample of content has been collected and coded in a designed database. Methodologically, the project has its starting point within "content analysis"; however, this is expanded and combined by interpretative observations and registrations. The sample moreover is gathered from YouTube's most popular videos and the principal arguments of this dissertation are thus presented within this context.

The dissertation furthermore advocates that YouTube, in terms of its medium specific affordances, contributes to a unique characteristic of online identity formation through the site. Consequently, the principal theoretical fundament, drawning on a Medium Theory macro-perspective is also extended to include a critical discussion of the contemporary theoretical turn, the so-called participatory culture, emerged within the perimeters of Cultural Studies. This lead to a theoretical position somewhat analogous to "symbolic interactionism", reflecting the dissertation's main theoretical position, i.e., social interaction and behaviour that are reflected by George Herbert Mead (1934), extended through Erving Goffman (1959) and have emerged in Joshua Meyrowitz' (1985) mediated focus on social interaction, which is finally applied to this project's investigation of identity formation on YouTube.

In the analysis, a group of Vlogs has been identified through the methodological approach, where the development of a typology of UGC has also proven necessary in order to identify specific modes of online identities and social behaviour. The analysis will be centred on self-images in the Vlog and modes of self-presentations, where especially the notion of authenticity is an important focus point.

Overall, the dissertation contributes with an understanding of audiovisual identity formation and social behaviour on the Internet, exemplified with YouTube, for which the project furthermore provides a sociocultural characterisation.

The dissertation as described above is presented in two parts. The first part is a monograph in which the fundamental theoretical framework is described, as well as the methodology and analysis, while the second part consists of four individual articles that elaborate on some of the essential arguments and analyses, theories and methodological considerations.

Article abstracts

Article I: *Categorising YouTube*

This article provides a genre analytical approach to creating a typology of the user-generated content (UGC) of YouTube. The article investigates the construction of navigation processes on the YouTube website. It suggests a pragmatic genre approach that is expanded through a focus on YouTube's technological affordances. Through an analysis of the different pragmatic contexts of YouTube, it is argued that a taxonomic understanding of YouTube must be analysed in regards to the vacillation of a user-driven bottom-up folksonomy and a hierarchical browsing system that emphasises a culture of competition and which favours the already popular content of YouTube.

With this taxonomic approach, the UGC videos are registered and analysed in terms of empirically based observations. The article identifies various UGC categories and their principal characteristics. Furthermore, general tendencies of the UGC within the interacting relationships of new and old genres are discussed. It is argued that the utility of a conventional categorical system is primarily of analytical and theoretical interest rather than as a practical instrument.

Article II: *The Mashups of YouTube*

This article focuses on YouTube Mashups and how we can understand them as a specific subgenre on YouTube. The Mashups are analysed as audiovisual transformations that are given new contextual meaning, e.g., of collaborative social communities or individual promotional purposes. Mashups moreover are discussed through a theoretical approach to terms like "Vernacular Creativity" and a revisited understanding of "remediation".

Through these approaches, the article further investigates how Mashups derive from a widespread popular culture and how the emergence of Mashups is influenced by the accessibility of YouTube as a media platform. The overall argument is that the novelty of Mashups is not be found in its formal characteristics, but rather in its social and communicative abilities within the YouTube community – both as acts of collaboration and participation, but also as acts of individual promotion.

Methodologically, the article draws on empirically based observations and within this, examples of Mashups are included in order to demonstrate their different aspects.

Article III: *Presentations of the Self on YouTube*

This article provides an introduction to the YouTube Vlog in a historical context and how it is specifically identified on YouTube. The article investigates the YouTube Vlog in regards to the notion of authenticity as an important feature of the Vlog that furthermore is identified as a performance. The article also investigates the Vlogs as an example of the home movie culture, e.g., presented and how YouTube as a media platform influences and changes the concept of the home mode, as well as how it is distributed. This also includes a discussion of YouTube's commercial influence on the characteristic of the Vlog. It moreover involves a discussion of how users navigate through the content on YouTube and, e.g., how they identify a hoax, and identify a Vlog as authentic.

The article investigates the YouTube Vlog by presenting several case studies of Vlogs taken from among the most popular content on YouTube.

Article IV: *The Performative Way of YouTube*

The focus of this article is online identity formation and social behaviour in YouTube videos, more specifically in user-generated content (UGC), advocating a theoretical framework of performative theory. Through this primarily theoretical approach, I discuss how it is possible to identify the constitution of the self within UGC content and especially in audiovisual first-person presentations.

One starting point for the analysis is Erving Goffman's micro-sociological approach to social performances and a discussion of this within a mediated context. For this reason, Joshua Meyrowitz' adaptation of Goffman in a mediated context also proves useful in regards to YouTube. Following this approach, the article demonstrates how specific social behaviour takes place within the videos.

Furthermore, the article discusses whether we can consider the constitution of identity as a construction of the subject, as most notably argued by Judith Butler on the theoretical grounds of J. L. Austin and Jacques Derrida. The article argues that an explicit integration of self-reflexivity and meta-communication challenges the constructivist perspective and suggests that this perspective must also be extended to involve, e.g., authenticity and transparency as fundamental criteria of successful presentations of oneself on YouTube.

Table of Contents

Table of Content Part II

Articles:

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the opportunity to write this dissertation provided by FKK (*Det Frie Forskningsråd | Kultur og Kommunikation*), in collaboration with the Department of Communication and Psychology at Aalborg University.

The study was moreover supported by the HCCI Program, which gave the opportunity to present and discuss my project on several occasions, which I am also grateful for.

A special thanks to my supervisor, Tove. A. Rasmussen for her support and academic guidance.

I also owe my gratitude to the MÆRKK-group, who gave me the opportunity to present my work and provide me with useful feedback. Also thanks to the P2P-group for letting me present my project and giving me constructive response.

In order to perform the Inter-coder reliability test, I had help and guidance from Esben Høg at the Department of Mathematical Sciences, whom I also owe thanks.

Thanks to Ole Erløv Hansen for good company and inspiring conversations during our drives on the Danish highway between Aarhus and Aalborg University.

I would also like to thank the colleagues at the e-Learning Lab for support and for accommodating me during the first period of my dissertation.

Also thanks to the administrative staff at the Department of Communication and Psychology at Aalborg University for their help during the process.

I would moreover like to give thanks to my two coding assistants, Marianne Højgaard Engemand and Stephanie Hvid, who did a great work with registering videos.

And finally, I owe thanks to my family: my parents and my loving wife, Teresa, for her patience and encouragement.

Introduction

The focus of this dissertation is on how creators of audiovisual content implement and construct mediated identities online. This dissertation examines how ordinary people use videos on YouTube to create online and undisclosed self-images that are evaluated instantly by an audience and furthermore judged by the creator's ability to present an authentic version of the self.

The understanding of the self on YouTube is overtly linked to the emergence of user-generated content (UGC). UGC is a term that reflects how individuals have become contributors to the public modern culture. UGC is often hailed as the personification of the Internet's social network sites and social media such as citizen journalism, Twitter, Facebook, Blogs and Wikipedia, just as YouTube is associated with UGC. Although YouTube is a reflection of a more widespread picture of our contemporary media culture, where people use YouTube as a media archive and watch music videos or old archive clips, its accentuating growth also reflects upon the emerging culture of UGC. YouTube is the world's largest provider of online audiovisual content and the third most visited website in the world. According to the official YouTube blog, YouTube as of January 2012 has exceeded "four billion video views globally every day" and "one hour of video uploaded to YouTube every second"[1]. This is an increase of 30% in traffic during the last 8 months, and the site seems to be steadily growing. It is impossible to determine the proportion of the uploaded content entailing UGC. But as stated by Website-monitoring.com in an earlier monitoring of YouTube data in 2010, when YouTube was "only" generating 2 billion videos per day: "More video is uploaded to YouTube in 60 days than all 3 major US networks created in 60 years" (cf. Website-monitoring.com). Consequently, UGC must account for an enormous amount of the videos uploaded to YouTube each day (since television broadcasters are nowhere near capable of producing the number of videos being consumed on YouTube).

The emergence of the assumedly large number of UGC reflects many aspects of our contemporary media culture including social networking, sharing ideas and creativity, but it also reveals an underlying aspect of modern identity. That is the articulation of the self in public or what, e.g., Graeme Turner has coined "the demotic turn", which describes an emerging culture of visibility regarding ordinary people in the media (2010, p. 2). The concept is not new, but it is, nevertheless, a suitable headline for the countless number of videos especially made by young people, who present themselves on YouTube and in which the striving for visibility is a principal feature. It is a more direct and much more widespread mode of visibility, where a whole generation of creators are presenting themselves in what can be considered a public performance culture.

YouTube as a media platform is a catalyst of this visibility, by providing ordinary people with access as well as control of their own self-images. The most explicit type is the audiovisual one-to-one presentation of the self that is sometimes referred to as a Video Blog or, as I will refer to it, a *Vlog*. The Vlog is the most widespread mode of self-presentation on YouTube. Self-images are not a new phenomenon and have existed throughout the history of self-biographies, self-portraits as well as diaries. On YouTube, we can experience how millions of people have defined whole new ways of being visible, presenting themselves directly to their audience and fellow creators, autonomous from public institutions and traditional expert systems. This development of user control has gotten researchers to start talking about "the empowerment of consumers" (Jenkins 2006) and a whole new "individual freedom" based on participation (Benkler 2006), which has been labelled by Axel Bruns as "producing democracy" (2008, p. 359). And in many ways it is a democratic revolution. The Twitter Revolution in Iran as well as the Arab Spring of 2011 certainly demonstrated how social digital media and new technology have empowered and provided ordinary people with a democratic voice.

[1] See: http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2012/01/holy-nyans-60-hours-per-minute-and-4.html.

But if we turn our focus to YouTube, it is at the same time a commercial platform that enables people to "broadcast" themselves online, but not just informative reflections; broadcasting the self is first and foremost accomplished in the context of entertainment. Identities on YouTube are performed identities that have been adjusted to be public displays of the self that need to be funny and entertaining in order to attract viewers; and this is not just the case on YouTube, but is evident in many aspects of modern culture. In this dissertation, I will be investigating a sample of some of the most popular creators of UGC, who in most cases furthermore are getting paid for producing videos. I am not interested in the economic impact of this, but rather how the social behaviour and performative role within these self-presentations are effected by a competitive and entertaining environment, as this environment arguably influences the construction of the self and how mediated identities are presented online. Counterbalancing this performing and entertaining self, self-images are inherently tied to the notion of authenticity that in most aspects of modern society is a highly valued characteristic. It is within this somewhat paradoxical co-existence of a mediated performative self that strives for the ability to perform an authentic impression of the self that in the following I will examine the construction of identity on YouTube, which primarily will be exemplified with the YouTube Vlog.

1.1 A documentary heritage, a personal motivation

It was through my former work as a producer and production manager of documentaries that I became aware of YouTube for the first time as more than just a regular streaming site and media archive. In October 2006, I was working for a former Danish production company, and we were doing some research for a forthcoming documentary on fictional and performed identities online. We soon stumbled upon the case of the now famous *Bree* or *LonelyGirl15*. *Bree* was a fictional character, who was playing a real person presenting her real life. The series was a hoax intended to create a buzz around the following fictional series. What fascinated us was how people were emotionality invested in the show apparently because of its ability to create an impression of the real. Although *LonelyGirl15* was scripted and staged, it involved a first-person presentation in which the girl was talking directly into the eyes of the viewer. I noticed how this provided the video with a fundamental documentary value, i.e., creating and presenting the impression of reality, despite that it was a hoax, which was imitating the style of the real first-person presentation. The number of viewers who felt betrayed was surprising for the creators (cf. Kingdom 2006) and the response to these negative reactions was an open letter from the creators stating that: "She is no more real or fictitious than the portions of our personalities that we choose to show (or hide) when we interact with the people around us" (Wayne 2007). This citation very much entails a basic characteristic of the numerous first-person presentations of the self that can be identified in the YouTube Vlog. The difference is not only that *LonelyGirl15* is fictional and the Vlogs contain real identities, but also that the Vlogs do not hide that they are presented in a mediated and symbolic context, and instead through self-reflexivity they make this fact into an explicit statement. The people behind *LonelyGirl15* had, on the contrary, tried to hide this fact and tried to camouflage the fictional character, thus ignoring the unwritten rules of social media, and that seemed to be one of the reasons why most fans refused to accept the following fictional world of *LonelyGirl15*, and the channel finally closed in 2008.

From this first real meeting with YouTube, I began to look around the site and at other examples of UGC, where the difference between documentary and UGC was of course clearly noticeable. Producing a documentary involves a long research phase, including the development of social characters as well as distinctive choices of style and narrative. However, these first person videos of real people, in contrast to *LonelyGirl15,* and which I later learned are called Vlogs, are basically just presenting a subject and nothing else. There is no causality, basic premise, or choice of aesthetics, but instead it involves a static web-cam or the fragmented and shaking frame of a cell-phone. It fascinated

me that despite this low-grade style and lack of focus, these videos were capable of maintaining my curiosity and interest, similar to the documentary genre. The videos presented on YouTube also were presented somewhat differently than, e.g., reality television or documentary, in terms of enabling an individual to create spontaneous and direct presentations of the self that are furthermore unfettered, which makes these forms of UGC somewhat unique.

I also noticed the great diversity of these first-person presentations that in most cases appeal to a younger audience in terms of the issues and themes they are addressing. This, in addition to a general lack of focus and interest in structuring the content, however, left me with an ambivalent stance regarding these videos. On the one hand, they are subjectively naïve and provide trivial images of everyday life that I normally never would subscribe to; but at the same time, I experienced how many of these videos possess the quality of presenting the creators as real persons, while at the same time being clearly performative and even including staged versions of life. It was this paradoxical combination that caught my attention. But instead of making a documentary about this phenomenon, some years later I got the opportunity to return to the field of academic research and further investigate UGC in regards to online identity-formation. This current study also thus contextualised my documentary approach and my interest in what I have called a documentary value, i.e., the ability to evoke an impression of authenticity, which hence also has become an underlying analytical focus of this dissertation.

1.2 Research Question

This dissertation proposes to contribute to the knowledge of the above-mentioned visibility and performance culture. More specifically, it is an investigation of online identities on YouTube and how audiovisuality is used to communicate and construct identity. The dissertation also investigates YouTube as media platform, where another aim is to contribute to the knowledge about YouTube as media phenomenon, and how its role as a media platform influences the construction of online identities. This results in the following research question:

> **How are audiovisual and mediated identities constructed on YouTube? And in which ways does YouTube as a media platform have an impact on the construction of online identity?**

This question is addressed using a sample of the most popular examples of UGC on YouTube observed in the summer 2010, and will be explained through a concrete analysis of UGC Vlogs. I will examine many aspects of other modes and forms of identity formation on YouTube, as well as provide an overall understanding of YouTube as a media platform.

1.3 Structure

This dissertation contains two parts. The first part consists of three overall sections, including a methodological approach, a theoretical framework, and an analysis of YouTube content with a special focus on the Vlog genre.

This dissertation draws its underlying arguments on the foundation of an empirical sample, in which 900 videos were collected and observed during June-August 2010. The methodological approach used with this sample is a content analysis inspired approach that will be discussed in chapter 2. This approach extends the traditional content analysis with a subjective and analytical dimension, following e.g. Krippendorff (2004), which is adjusted to YouTube's various different aspects. Chapter 3 applies this approach to YouTube, where a coding scheme has been designed, and registrations made of several categories, keywords and modes of communication, which together should provide a typology of different modes of UGC and therein how we can identify the Vlog as a specific type of self-

presentation. This methodological approach takes as its starting point a discussion about how to study YouTube, which also involves previous studies of the site, and why YouTube is more suitable for this study than other similar online streaming sites as discussed in chapter 2. This approach moreover provides the dissertation with a typological framework of UGC, through which different types of UGC are identified (in section *3.4*)[2]. The coding scheme designed for the empirical part of the study also has as its starting point a documentary context relying on different already existing modes of communication and a discussion of the relationship between fiction and non-fiction. In order to investigate the tendencies registered in the coding process, an Intercoder-reliability test is applied and described in chapter 4 (and documented in the attached data-CD).

An overall issue is also navigation on YouTube in regards to its interface and organisation of the content and how this ultimately leaves us with a sample of the most popular content that will be discussed in both Chapter 2 and 3.

This issue is also pursued in the next chapters (chapter 6-8), where YouTube is discussed in regards to this study's theoretical framework. In order to understand the role of YouTube as a media platform, its organisation and structure of content are discussed within a framework and combination of two overall approaches. These two overall approaches will furthermore lead to a discussion of the notion of identity as well as authenticity in regards to YouTube.

In chapter 6, a macro-scale perspective is applied in order to understand YouTube as a media platform. I will apply aspects from the so-called Medium Theory approach and more concretely by applying Joshua Meyrowitz' media sociological interpretation of medium theory, rather than its frequently criticised emphasis on technological determinism. This approach is extended in an analysis of YouTube's characteristic features in Chapter 7**.** Here it is elaborated how we can understand the site in comparison with television as well as an exponent for social media.

Nevertheless, the medium theory inspired approach has its obvious limitations in regards to in-depth analyses as well as a lack in empirical focus, but especially in regards to the former. I thus have chosen to combine this theoretical macro-perspective with a Cultural Studies inspired approach that especially proves useful in terms of its underlying focus on the practices of everyday life. This second approach is discussed and analysed in regards to YouTube in chapter 8. The involvement of cultural studies is first and foremost an involvement of contemporary studies of the individual and ordinary subject as a creator and consumer rather than an adaptation of its methodology. However, it is not solely a continuation of these thoughts within this theory, but also a critical reflection and discussion of individual consumers situated on YouTube, in between commercialisation and user-empowered idealism.

Being specifically interested in the social relationships and social behaviour that result in specific roles and performative behaviour within the content, the most beneficial approach for this study is perhaps a combination of these two overall theoretical frameworks in terms of what has been referred to as "symbolic interactionism". This approach has been most notably adapted by Meyrowitz, and it furthermore includes well-established sociological approaches to interpersonal communication, including George Herbert (1934), Horton and Wohl (1956) as well as Erving Goffman's early theory (1959). In regards to YouTube, I have bridged some of these approaches with the field of media studies, as they provide the following analyses of YouTube content with a basis for understanding

[2] During the disseration I will contineously refer to different sections of the study as numbered in the Table of content, but also sub-sections that are not outlined in the Table of content.

social behaviour as well as identity formation, as will be discussed in regards to visibility, performance and authenticity in the last paragraphs of chapter 8.

From the fundament and results of the content analysis, and in regards to the theoretical framework, the Vlogs will be analysed in chapters 9-14. The analysis of the Vlogs will include a combination of a text analysis and a media-sociological inspired analysis of social behaviour and social performances within the content and will be introduced in chapter 9. The Vlogs are the most explicit examples of self-presentation and they will be studied through several examples that will cover the various aspects of identity formation that can be recognised in the Vlog. This also includes a division of the Vlog into three subgenres (section 9.3) in terms of how online identity is distinctively communicated through these different types. The focus, however, primarily will be on the personal presentation of the self as the most predominant type (chapter 10 and 11). In chapter 12 and 13 the two other types of Vlogs are analysed and compared to the more personal type exemplified in chapter 11. This also involves an examination of the notion of authenticity that, it is being argued, is a principal value in all three types of Vlogs. Finally, the analysis ends in chapter 14 with a discussion of a general understanding of the construction of identity, including other types of UGC.

1.4 Part II: Description of the Articles

The second part of the dissertation consists of four individual articles that have been written during this 3-year study process. They have functioned as my own guidelines in terms of the overall focus and thus reflect the process of my study of YouTube. The four articles are:

- *Categorising YouTube* (published in *MedieKultur vol. 27, Nr. 51*)
- *The Mashups of YouTube* (the manuscript has been submitted to peer-review in Nordicom Review)
- *Presentations of the Self on YouTube* (presented as a paper at Nordmedia Conference 2011, and submitted for peer-review in the forthcoming anthology "Living images on the Internet" (Hansen and Højbjerg (Eds.) 2012)
- *The Performative Way of YouTube* (the manuscript has been submitted for peer-review in the special issue, "Socially Mediated Publicness" In *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*)

Categorising YouTube is a genre analysis of UGC that also draws on the aforementioned empirical study and observation of YouTube content, and discusses the principles of navigating among the UGC content on the site.

The second article, *The Mashups of YouTube*, focuses on the so-called Mashup genre, which it identifies and describes both in a media-historical context, but also in regards to its abilities to communicate and connect people within a social community.

Presentations of the Self on YouTube is a description of the Vlog, likewise in a historical context, but also in regards to its specific characteristics as the consequences of being distributed on YouTube. These are described with selected case-studies, which do not necessarily refer to the empirical sample.

The last article is called *The Performative ways of YouTube,* and it is a theoretical investigation of the performance term that is applied to YouTube content and more specifically to the YouTube Vlog,

where it is argued that self-presentation in the Vlog can be regarded a social performance and an underlying element in understanding online identity on YouTube.

These articles are frequently referred to in the first part of the dissertation, and it is recommended that they be read early on, as several aspects of the analysis in the first part draw on many of the arguments presented in especially the last two articles. The main reason for combining the dissertation with a monograph and four independent articles was to accommodate with the complexity and widespread concepts of YouTube, where this combination allowed me to keep the focus on my main research question, while at the same time, at least in two of the articles, elaborating on other aspects. This included an analysis of a somewhat rather large group of videos, i.e., Mashups, which I have chosen to distinguish from regular UGC. Furthermore, the Mashups complement several aspects from the analysis. *Categorising YouTube* was the result of using the methodological framework in a concrete analysis of typology and navigation of YouTube that has not previously been described, and an individual article could provide a focus on genre analysis that would not interfere with the main focus of the analysis in chapter 9-14. The two last articles were written in association with the analyses and they therefore to some extent overlap the analyses. By writing these articles, I also identified my analytical focus in the Vlog, as outlined in the *Presentations of the Self on YouTube,* just like the theoretical arguments on social and performative behaviour proved useful in the analysis and as complements for the theoretical framework of the first part of the dissertation. The two last articles in that sense can also be regarded as the fundament for the analysis that is added in order to elaborate on some of the principal arguments made in these two articles.

This also raises the second reason to write this dissertation as a combination of a monograph and individual articles, as the articles have also served as guidelines and points of reference in the analytical process, where I have been able to reflect and re-consider arguments over a longer period of time.

2. Studying YouTube: a content analysis inspired approach

2.1. The emerging discipline of Internet Studies

Studying YouTube entails an acknowledgment of the emerging field of "Internet Studies", which since the late 1990s has been analogous with the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR). But what does Internet Studies entail? Internet studies, over the course of its short existence, has developed in many ways. Researchers involved in early Internet studies were accused of technological determinism (cf. Consalvo and Ess 2011, p. 2) as a reflection of an early fascination and reflexive excitement regarding the emergence of a new media. This aspect is also touched upon by Barry Wellman (2011), who argues that Internet Studies has moved from euphoric celebrations of the emergence of a new media, through a second phase of large-scale surveys of Internet users, towards a third phase that is more interdisciplinary, in which the Internet has become a common phenomenon that is furthermore integrated as a concrete choice of method (cf. p. 22).

Across these phases, the fundamental issue is nonetheless still the complexity of the Internet as a medium that can be said to be a "medium of mediums" (cf. Steve Jones 2010, p. xv) that can contain all previous forms of media (cf. Finnemann 2005a). Or as Henry Jenkins (2006), among others, has stated, the Internet is very much the manifestation of media convergence, "the merging of media". On YouTube we can recognise online video content that uses codes of audiovisuality, which we are familiar with from television, cinema as well as computer game media. The obvious question is thus: why not study the different features of the Internet in correspondence with previous studies of audiovisual media content?

Arguably, to some extent this also is being done, but in most cases with a somewhat revisited approach. Internet Studies is thus best coined as an interdisciplinary term that takes on different venues and different standards defined by individual researchers, as argued by Markham and Baym (2009), who emphasise "the commitment to making sense of the new by understanding their research processes' and object's continuity with the past" (p. xv).

Perhaps the biggest challenge when studying the Internet is its constant changeability. If we take a look at YouTube, which was launched in 2005, although its principle interface is still intact, it continuously has changed formats, features and forms of user-engagement. In the three-year period of this study, YouTube has changed its parameters for browsing, rating and uploading several times, which also makes it necessary to emphasise that this present study of YouTube is a study of the site during a specific time period. Another argument, as Steve Jones also emphasises, for reconsidering the reliance on old methods, is the fundamental need for understanding the changes in terms of accessibility and user-control (cf. 2010, p. xv). Consequently, this leads to a view of YouTube's content as remediations of already existing content (that is the "representation of one medium in another" (Bolter and Grusin 1999, p. 45), as I shall return to in *6.8*, but at the same time the content is uniquely constructed within the context of YouTube. As such YouTube content is analysed in comparison with already existing forms of audiovisuality, but affordances specifically related to YouTube are integrated into the analytical approach, thus following the contextualised approach to YouTube as proposed by Markham and Baym in terms of involving aspects that both predate the Internet, but are simultaneously adapted for it. One issue regarding Internet Studies that was not included in earlier research on media, such as television, is the distinction between online and offline studies. In qualitative studies, this aspect is relevant in regards to the role of the researcher, who is often expected to treat focus groups and interviews quite differently in online situations versus offline. This is linked somewhat to how online-identity formation has been discussed by researchers in comparison to offline identities. Offline studies are usually concerned with the impact of technology on our social lives, for example, in our domestic

settings, which are manifested in ethnographic observations of human interaction with technology (cf. Orgad 2009, p. 36).

Christine Hine argues, in her book *Virtual Ethnography* (2000), for an online ethnographic approach that uses the Internet as a research field in itself. She uses an observational ethnographic approach that is highly involved in the field of research. Her research among others illustrates that the distinction of the online/offline relationship is becoming increasingly less important. This change is also a consequence of the development of the Internet within social media, which have turned predominantly anonymous online identities of virtual online communities into much more visible and present modes of self-presentation (e.g., Facebook and YouTube) and thus made them more similar to offline interpersonal communication.

The current study examines online data collected on YouTube. Of course, offline data could also have been integrated, but as I will attempt to demonstrate, it would arguably have not contributed with radically different meaning and/or information than I was able to observe and register by analysing the online content. The main reason is that this study investigates actions and performances carried out online. The very foundation of social behaviour and identity formation on YouTube is entirely based on publication and visibility online. But the identities investigated are also online versions of the self that do not deny the existence of an offline identity. On the contrary, online identities in terms of authenticity are strongly dependent on their referential relationships with their offline identities. But this does not mean we need to investigate aspects of these identities offline. As also demonstrated by, e.g., Kate Eichhorn (2001) in her study of "zines" (small-scale fan magazines), investigations of environments and identities can take place without examining offline data.

In the following, I shall briefly examine different approaches of how to study YouTube and elaborate on the approaches that I have chosen to apply to this project.

2.2 How to study YouTube?

The question of how to study YouTube is very much related to another question: what specific parts and phenomena of YouTube are we studying? During the frequent presentations of my project over the course of the 3-year process, I was constantly asked why I did not include or apply a qualitative analytical method that would involve an offline dimension, such as interviews or focus groups. And if not, why I had not "gone native", i.e., using an ethnographic approach as favoured by, e.g., Christine Hine (2000) or Donath Boyd (2008). A short answer would be that the concrete aspect of YouTube that I am studying is not fundamentally concerned with audience behaviour or what people learn from watching videos on YouTube. Instead, I am interested in YouTube as a media platform, in its content and how mediated identities and online interpersonal communication take place and are presented *within* this content.

There are alternative approaches: e.g., self-representation could have been explored through interview-based investigations, content could have been categorised using a survey etc. By involving a focus-group interview of creators of user-generated content, for instance, it would have been possible to determine their motivation for creating videos, which would probably also tell us something about the content. Patricia Lange (2007) was one of the first researchers to apply an ethnographic approach in regards to YouTube, which she also combined with semi-structured interviews with both online and offline participants. But as will be elaborated in *2.4*, her approach limited the analysis to a very small group of creators – studied within a small network. Such an approach would furthermore have moved this dissertation in a different direction, with a focus on reception behaviours of consuming content rather than how social behaviour takes place within the content as intended here.

There are also other limitations regarding interviewed-based qualitative investigations or focus groups. For example, involving offline data to supplement online identity formation would arguably result in a distanced role of self-reflexivity in comparison with the observational registration of identity formation within content.

David Buckingham et al. (2009, 2011) have also conducted an extensive investigation of home videos and the reflection of domestic life. This group of researchers conducted an extensive study by administering surveys, large-scale interviews, focus groups as well as different ethnographic investigations. However, their focus group analysis demonstrates, as in the case of Lange, that only a relatively small focus group was possible, making it difficult to obtain a representative sample. Although I am not arguing that my sample is a fully representative sample of YouTube content, the intention with the coding of 900 videos in this case was nonetheless to discuss and examine tendencies within the content. This dimension would most likely not be achieved by involving qualitative interviews as a method. Buckingham et al. also mention that participants were clearly affected by a self-awareness of being research participants; this concretely led to self-reflection on the status of them as producers (cf. 2011, p. 44). Such a factor could thus influence the current aim of analysing identity formation. This of course would be an interesting analysis of methodology, but does not fall within the scope of interest here. What we must also consider is that people do not always tell the truth or have accurate recall when being interviewed. Informants moreover tend to construct answers that they think will be preferred by the interviewer (cf. Berger 2000, p. 124). This is also linked to the potential subjectivity of the interviewer potentially asking leading questions. The researcher moreover potentially could favour certain answers and interview individuals with better vocabularies (cf. Hagen 2000, p. 111). Furthermore, some of the aspects examined here are also easier to attain by observation of content than by direct interaction with the creators. For instance, it is arguably difficult to discuss "amateur style" with the creators since it automatically implies disregard for their creative abilities. Another issue would be the discussion of their status as YouTube Partners and what this means for their self-presentational roles. Because the status of a YouTube Partner is often negatively associated with commercialisation and insincerity, it is therefore not something most creators would like to comment on or discuss honestly. Likewise it is difficult in an interview setting for creators to provide useful answers to questions concerning the use of intertextuality and meta-commenting since many of these actions are not necessarily conscious acts.

Finally, there is also the possibility of using an analytical survey that could provide data from the sample with a higher degree of empirical value regarding how and why people behave the way they do (cf. Berger 2000, p. 188). A survey could overcome some of the aspects discussed above. However, taking the complex elements of online identity and social behaviour into consideration, the use of, e.g., a questionnaire could involve too many levels of complexity; i.e., the many variables behind the possible answers, the potential for misinterpretation of questions as well as the uncertainty validating the people participating.

Thus, there is no right way to study YouTube. The method and approach entirely depend on which specific aspect of YouTube one is studying. In this particular context, with the specific focus on online identity formation and social behaviour within the content, I will, in the following, apply a content-analysis inspired approach in combination with genre analysis and further involve in depth-analyses of selected content, which have proven to be the best approach when attempting to analyse audiovisual content as well as intending to discuss patterns and distinctions of different forms of self-presentation. Nonetheless, it would have provided an extra dimension to the project, if I had included online interviews with the creators in the analysis. However, in terms of the chosen focus and limited scope, I

did not include this dimension, since the social interaction taking place here is analysed within the content. Instead, the dissertation will include a peripheral focus on reception by drawing on already existing sources, such as data from monitoring online traffic, e.g., Alexa.com, as well as available data from YouTube content and its users. This includes comment writing responses and the general demographic data associated with most videos – although vulnerable to the accuracy of YouTube's own measurements.

2.3 A content-analysis inspired approach

Content analysis is a traditional method used in quantitative studies of texts, which through classification measures appearances of observable findings inside the content of texts. Content analysis was introduced by Bernard Berelson as a "research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (1952, p. 81; quoted in McQuail 2000, p. 325). Berelson's understanding of content analysis is the fundament for the traditional quantitative approach that first and foremost counts and measures content components. As argued by Berger (2000, pp. 176-177), a content analysis is most useful through the involvement of a historical approach as well as a comparative approach. The current study of YouTube does not follow the historical approach, but it does involve dimensions of comparison between the appearance of non-UGC vs. UGC as well as a comparison between different forms of UGC. The involvement of a content inspired approach is rather of methodological concern. It can be considered a useful tool of identifying and distinguishing certain cultural patterns, providing us with an overview of the organisation of content, which can furthermore lead to isolation of specific content that is universally agreed upon.

Klaus Krippendorff (2004) mentions three fundamental characteristics that apply to contemporary content analysis.

The first characteristic is that "*content analysis is an empirically grounded method*" (2004, p. xvii) [italics in original]. Content analysis is a quantitative approach that in regards to YouTube first and foremost makes sense if we consider YouTube as a database and its content as data. Each video consists of various forms of information that can be registered through, e.g., tags that function as key words. The problem is, however, that these are too narrowly defined. Another method for identification of data is the algorithmic-based organisation of content in terms of ratings and viewing counts. These parameters enable us to navigate through YouTube as a database, which is emphasised in the article *Categorising YouTube*.

The second characteristic is that content analysis *"transcends traditional notions of symbols, contents and intents*" (ibid., p. xviii) [italics in original]. A significant aspect of content analysis is a universal and unambiguous approach, which assumes that the applied references and categories can be read and understood by others. This is a fundamental aspect of traditional content analysis, but with the increasing complexity of different communications tools, the notion of content must accordingly be revisited as Krippendorff also argues. A central concern of content analysis is nonetheless ascertaining the reliability of categories, as also underlined by Weber:

> In order to draw valid inferences from the text, it is important that the classification procedure used be reliable in the sense of being consistent: Different people should code the same text in the same way (1985, p. 12).

This aspect can be difficult to obtain in regards to the intended observed issues, such as overall distinctions between fiction and non-fiction as well as specific modes of communication, which are not detectable or inherent in the text, but are dependent on coders' interpretative abilities. The observations

and coding performed here therefore would not be considered a traditional content analysis approach in the sense that the findings are inherent in the text as, e.g., argued by Berelson (1952). Only objective components such as length, appearances of credits, background music, texts, signs, voiceovers and first-person camera could be applied in a traditional content analysis. The specific sample analysed here is rather a combination of interpretative and subjective measurements along with objective and general registrations. A content analysis inspired approach is always subject to the issues of validity and reliability. This is also related to the differences between human and computer coding. But dealing with audiovisual content and contexts such as meta-data, I argue a computer-based registration will easily result in narrow and incomplete registrations.

Krippendorff's third characteristic is that "*contemporary content analysis has been forced to develop a methodology of its own*" (2004, p. xx) [italics in original]. Due to the fact that consumption of content takes place in a much larger context, there is a need to advocate an individually designed analysis, which is adjusted to the phenomenon being investigated. This therefore calls for different research techniques (ibid., p. xxi). In regards to YouTube, it has become obvious that we are dealing with a site of audiovisual content that as of yet does not provide any conventional components.

As Krippendorff further states, individual techniques of content analysis should further result in "findings that are *replicable*" (ibid., p. 18) [italics in original]. One way of checking this is to involve an "Intercoder reliability" test (also see Weber 1985, p. 17), in which the same content is coded by more than one coder to determine if the coders' findings are comparable. This test will also be applied to the current study (cf. Chapter 4).

Krippendorff is sceptical of Berelson's definition of content analysis in terms of his insinuation ("the manifest content of communication") that content resides in a text. On the contrary, he acknowledges content analysis as a creation of meaning that "takes content to *emerge in the process of a researcher analyzing a text* relative to a particular context" (ibid., p. 19) [italics in original]. This is also the approach applied here, where the meaning of the text is central to its coding and therefore also dependent on text analysis.

Other researchers have also advocated a step away from the traditional understanding of content analysis by, e.g., the involvement of a qualitative dimension as proposed by Shoemaker and Reese, who in their "behavioural" content analysis include a qualitative analysis as an overt dimension in understanding all aspects of the text:

> Reducing large amounts of texts to quantitative data (…) does not provide a complete picture of meaning and contextual codes, since texts may contain other forms of emphasis besides sheer repetition (1996, p. 32).

They advocate for a more contextual approach (also see Neuman 1997) that moves the analysis towards a polysemic and open interpretation of texts; as Jim Macnamara furthermore states, "qualitative content analysis relies heavily on researcher 'readings' and interpretation of media texts" (2006, p. 6).

Finally, Susan Herring (2004) has also argued for a wider approach towards content analysis, mainly as a reflection on new media as an object of analysis much more multimodal and dynamic with new forms of communication and "novel features" (2004, p. 51) compared to the traditional analytical focus of content analysis. As she argues, traditional content analysis is therefore challenged in terms of a strict and too narrow focus:

> (…) even the most basic aspects of content analysis of new media, such as defining and selecting content for analysis, raise challenges to traditional CA paradigm, narrowly defined. Notions of units of analysis

> comparable to those in traditional media, random sampling, and informed consent must all be rethought in the context of new media research. These observations, taken together with the desirability of incorporating new methods to address characteristic features of new media such as hyperlinks and textual conversations, suggest a need for a broader construal of CA that allows new media to dictate new methods tailored to the analysis of digital content (2004, p. 57).

Allowing the specific media to dictate new methods suggests an analytical focus on what is specific to YouTube in order to apply and design a coding set that is somewhat adaptable regarding a mutual understanding of what YouTube is for different coders. The big challenge for this is the lack of conventionality. Although YouTube adopts already existing content, it is at the same time also something completely different. This is explained by YouTube's rather short existence (since 2005) and its changeability as a media platform, which puts us in no position to adopt a conventional or standardised set of categories as suggested in the strict understanding of content analysis. Based on the above-mentioned theoretical discussions, I therefore argue for a wider use of content analysis that involves both a level of text analysis as well as a subjective categorisation approach that applies Krippendorff's understanding of contemporary content analysis.

2.4 YouTube as popular culture: previous studies of YouTube

One of the first investigations of YouTube was Patricia Lange's (2007) ethnographic approach combined with in depth-interviews of 54 individuals performed in 2006. She conducted a study of the consumption of YouTube videos and video sharing practices in social networks. Her findings showed that participants "often post comments to increase their social visibility and connection to a video maker" (2007, p. 6). This also supports some of the analyses of the content that likewise indicate how creators in the videos encourage participation in order to gain visibility. Lange also analyses the distinction between privacy and publicity, as uploaders can decide their level of privacy when putting the video on YouTube. In regards to this project, as already argued, within the sphere of the most popular content, there are no cases of private video making. Lange uses her sample to primarily focus on the private social networks that exist on a much smaller scale than the videos investigated here.

In contrast to Lange's in-depth and small-scale analysis of YouTube's social networks, Cha et al. (2007) provide one of the first large-scale, empirical investigations of YouTube, in which they discuss "the popularity life cycle of videos" (2007, p. 1) as well as focus on niche content. Drawing on a social network analysis, they demonstrate that popular content of YouTube is controlled by power-law distribution and is fundamentally defined by "information filtering" (e.g., search filters always favour small numbers of the most popular videos). Cha et al. describe the overall lines of content circulation, but do not provide more detailed distinctions of UGC and whether some content is more popular than others and why this may be the case. Their choice of data from YouTube's available categories, such as "Entertainment" and "How To & DIY", as also argued by Burgess and Green (2009, p. 8), are too thematically tied to idiosyncratic tags that in many cases are misleading, as will be elaborated on later.

Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's *YouTube – Online Video and Participatory Culture* (2009) is the first monograph and still the most quoted investigation of YouTube. Although based on a survey of YouTube content from 2007, the book's arguments are still relevant and useful at the end of 2011. Their results support some of the findings in this dissertation. This includes their presentation of specific content tendencies that are also noticeable in 2011; i.e., the predominance of UGC and more specifically the first-person videos, the so-called Vlogs, as will be discussed later in depth. Burgess and Green performed a survey of 4,320 videos collected between August and November 2007 (cf. 2009, p.9) in combination with closer readings of selective cases. In that sense, the methodological approach of this dissertation is also somewhat attributed to them. Burgess and Green's main intention was to identify the structure of YouTube and to analyse YouTube as a cultural system and as a community.

This enabled them to present their main argument, stating "YouTube is a site of participatory culture" (ibid., vii) and they thereby acknowledged the importance of user-empowerment, placing themselves within the tradition of contemporary cultural studies. Their findings demonstrate that the most popular content is slightly dominated by UGC. Within UGC, they found a clear predominance of the Vlog. Burgess and Green, however, do not go further in depth with their definition of genres and coding components or other features of their design, other than mentioning the genres: *Vlog* (clearly dominant in the sample at 40%), UGC music videos (15%), live material, (13%), Musical Performances (10%), informational content (10%) and scripted material (8%) (ibid., p. 43). This dissertation will go more in depth regarding the content, both through registration of components, but also through selective examples of UGC content. Genre aspects will furthermore be elaborated in detail in the article *Categorising YouTube* in order to investigate the specific different forms of UGC, as well as the characteristics of self-presentations that can be identified through the content analytical approach.

Burgess and Green moreover return to their sample's status as a reflection of the most popular browsing categories, as they state the following about the categories: "Because they communicate to the audience what counts as popular on YouTube, these metrics also take an active role in creating the reality of what is popular" (ibid., p. 41). In that sense, the understanding of popularity on YouTube is based on what the audience is being told is popular, which also includes their sample as well as the current sample, which by considering these categories as the popular content of YouTube are thus turning into the most popular content based on YouTube's own parameters of popularity that thereby set the standard of how and when something becomes popular. This means that the study conducted here is also the result of how YouTube has organised its forms of navigation and that we automatically end up with a sample of the most promoted content on YouTube.

This is also the case in the article *Art or Circus*, in which Brian Landry and Mark Guzdial (2008) present a content-analysis inspired investigation of YouTube videos in order to determine whether UGC could be related to storytelling. Their approach is similar to this dissertation; 500 videos were gathered from among the most popular ("high valued" cf. ibid.) and from there they randomly selected 100 UGC videos, differentiated from professional media content on the basis of appearance in mainstream media. Based on genre components and narrative components, they present four different types of UGC. These include: *Activism/Outreach*, *Instructional videos*, *Performance/Exhibition* and *Experiment*. These four different types somewhat correspond (although too widely defined cf. *3.4*) to some of the proposed UGC modes in this dissertation (see also *Categorising YouTube*).

Landry and Guzdial also reflect upon the limited possibilities of selecting data on YouTube:

> Filtering YouTube is limited to popularity, time and predefined categories. In such a study, one might consider sampling videos of most, least and average popularity to evaluate the properties of YouTube video. However, the categorizations provided to YouTube users for browsing the site do not allow for selecting videos in this manner (2008, p.3).

In that sense, their sample is governed by the same underlying paradox as Burgess and Green's. This current study is facing the same paradox; it is almost impossible to categorically study YouTube's least and average popular content. Only the most popular content can be categorically analysed. But as they also imply, since these are the possibilities also given to users, a study of the most popular content is a reflection of the possibilities users are met with when visiting the YouTube main website.

2.4.1. Is it not possible to avoid a sample only consisting of the most popular content on YouTube?

Molyneaux et al. (2008) tried a different approach to collecting data. They also used a content analysis inspired approach combined with audience research in order to analyse how "women and men communicate using vlogs and react as viewers to vlogs" (2008, p. 1). They investigated this through a random sample of Vlogs based on 30,000 entries associated with the word "blog" (apparently because the term "Vlog" was not yet invented). Their research excluded entries longer than 3 minutes and non-English blogs, leaving a sample of 1,028 videos. Their analysis is primarily concerned with gender issues, and they conclude that 58% of the creators were men and 33% were women, while the rest could not be identified. The typical Vlogger furthermore had an average age of 23 years, which seems to correspond with the average Internet user, also reflected in the statistics for 2011 according to Alexa.com (see Figure 1). Conducted in 2006, the investigation reflects upon several aspects that are interesting in comparison with the Vlogs analysed here. Molyneaux et al. conclude that the personal Vlogs, in terms of a more serious tone and intimate reflections, are predominant while the more entertaining Vlogs are less apparent.

In 2006, their investigation may very well have mirrored a more random sample containing both the least and most popular content on YouTube, where a 3-minute time limit also made more sense. If a similar investigation were to be performed today, a very different sample would most likely appear. The average length of a Vlog in the current sample is close to 6 minutes, and it would therefore be misrepresentative to exclude content based on a 3 minute limit. This is of course due to development of the site in terms of broadband speed and regulations of allowed duration of uploaded content. But another and more important issue is whether a random sample based on keywords provides a more representative sample. By typing in the word "blog" in the search function on YouTube, 954,000 results appear[3]. On the first four search pages there are no videos with less than 10,000 views and only 2 videos within the first 100 videos had less than 1,000 views. This clearly indicates that a random search on YouTube most likely involves already popular content, which is an example of power-law distribution as argued by, e.g., Cha et al. (2007). Another aspect of this is determining whether the video is in fact a Vlog. Molyneaux et al (2008) assume that when they type the entry word "blog", this will automatically result in a sample of video blogs, but this approach ignores the fact that the search function of YouTube entirely relies on idiosyncratic tagging that in many cases has proven to be misleading (cf. Lange 2007, p. 6, and Burgess and Green 2009, p. 8).

Michael Strangelove takes a similar approach in his more ethnographic investigation of YouTube based on his personal interaction with the site. This approach turns the focus on the less popular content combined with randomly selected examples of famous YouTube videos. But there is no clear methodology behind his approach and the conclusions he draws are rather selective illustrations or as he states: "An ethnographer's text, such as Watching YouTube, is said to gain its authority from the writer's personal experience" (2010, p. 9). This also seems to be Strangelove's argument for using the somewhat random and idiosyncratic approach in his investigation of YouTube content, including an analysis of the "vomit genre" (ibid., pp. 28-29). But as Strangelove also states: "no one text can authoritatively represent the people, communities, and culture of the 'Tube' in their entirety" (ibid.). Strangelove has a good point when stating that no matter what one's approach towards YouTube is, its widespread structure and the massive amount of videos make it impossible to provide a representative sample of the content of the site. Despite Strangelove's many insights and useful reflections on YouTube, his approach demonstrates, similar to Molyneaux et al. (2008), that a random search approach to YouTube cannot offer a better representative sample of YouTube.

[3] This search was performed 10 October 2011.

In sum, a proposal for obtaining a substantially representative of YouTube would thus be one that involves both the small and closed social networks with very few views or comments in combination with the collection of data gathered here. However, the overall elements being investigated here are not primarily regarding consumption of content or reception of these, but instead the meaning created and communicated as audiovisual content. I will therefore mainly involve the receptive dimension in the form of user comments related to the videos as well as rely on the statistical data available on the YouTube website and from other websites monitoring the traffic of Internet data. Although Patricia Lange's research is very relevant for understanding individual and private communication when watching videos, I argue that the extent of this perspective of involving, e.g., in-depth interviews will draw attention away from other contexts (herein the content) and the focus on YouTube as a media platform. In the following, therefore, I will present a sample that instead corresponds with the approaches of Burgess and Green as well as Landry and Guzdial, but I attempt to involve temporal distinctions in order to broaden the sample. Furthermore, I will combine the content analysis with more detailed and in-depth audiovisual analyses, as well as including a receptive dimension in terms of comment writing, and already existing demographic data about YouTube consumption.

In addition to the theories mentioned above, other anthologies have focussed on YouTube: e.g., *The Vortex Reader* (2008) and *The YouTube Reader* (2009). However, I will not describe these anthologies in detail here, since they do not include methodological approaches to studying YouTube.

By incorporating the different approaches to Internet Studies with the previous studies of YouTube, this dissertation argues for a content analysis inspired approach supported by a genre analysis that has proved useful in identifying the object being analysed. This includes distinctions of agency, forms of distribution and communication as well as medium specific properties that will go much more into detail regarding the content than did the previous studies. Before closely examining the different components of content, there are several issues in need of clarification.

2.5 Ethical issues

One essential issue in regards to Internet Studies concerns ethics, especially in regards to privacy and the Internet as a public space. Studying YouTube leads to the following question: to what extent do researchers need to be visible to the subject they investigate? Many digital ethnographers have pleaded for direct researcher involvement and presence (e.g., Boyd 2008, Markham and Baym 2009), but as argued earlier this makes little sense in this context. However, it does raise the issues of anonymity and privacy, and these are very much blurred on the Internet. Herring asks: "should researchers thus be able to cite them [authors] without permission?" (2004, p. 53). This is a relevant question in regards to how the content has been collected in the current dissertation. I have not been in contact with the creators of the content, and I have chosen not to make the creators anonymous. These choices are based on the consideration that most of the videos in this sample have hundreds of thousands of views and thousands of comments, which makes the question of privacy in a public space such as YouTube less compromising. Moreover, creators are explicitly asked, when uploading a video, to define the degree of privacy of their video. People can choose to make their content "Private" (only people allowed by the uploader can view), "Unlisted" (everyone with a link can view) or "Public" (everybody can view). The videos referred to here are all intentionally public videos, a choice made by the creators. This does not prevent creators of films to publish videos of people who are unaware of being filmed, but as my main analytical focus is on explicit forms of self-presentations, examining the people who uploaded the videos, this is not an issue concerning this project. I assume that the first-person videos that I mainly analyse are intentionally public and issues of anonymity and privacy are therefore not a problematic aspect of this sample.

I also include written video comments in the sample. Although these are public as well, I have chosen to make all quotations written by users anonymous by erasing the sender's name. As Herring objects, however, this may not prevent comment writers from being identified (ibid., p. 55); I would argue, nevertheless, that most comment writers are already anonymous in terms of their YouTube character names and moreover they rarely reveal any damaging personal or private information directly in the comments, which thus overshadows Herring's objection.

2.6 Why YouTube?

Streaming sites like Vimeo, Dailymotion.com, Current TV, Mefeedia.com, Blip.tv and VlogDIR.com are all different providers of online streaming that could also have been included in the current analyses. I will, however, in the following propose that YouTube is by far the most widespread provider of online video streaming and thereby also the best representative of the different aspects of how we can understand online identity formation. I will briefly examine two other possible streaming sites and argue why YouTube is a better case study than these two.

Dailymotion is the Internet's second largest video sharing site (Alexa.com traffic rank 95, YouTube is ranked 3) and is a French parallel to YouTube. It has adopted a similar interface and navigation design as YouTube. Static demographics derived from Alexa.com show (cf. Figure 1) that for Dailymotion the demographic group of men between 18-24 years is significantly more represented than other ages, while females are under-represented. These statistics are probably explained by the fact that Dailymotion also has pornographic videos. The streaming site Vimeo (Alexa.com traffic rank 117) is the third largest video sharing site and has a more worldwide profile, but also a somewhat different profile than YouTube and Dailymotion, which makes it a more interesting site to compare with YouTube. Vimeo is different from YouTube in several ways. In terms of size, YouTube generates more than 4 billions views each day, while Vimeo generates far fewer. But the purpose of the site is also different. As Vimeo states in their community guideline:

> Vimeo exists to provide you with a space to showcase your creativity and share your life. As such, we do not allow you to upload videos that are commercial in nature or videos that you did not make yourself[4].

Users can therefore not upload funny incidents they watch on TV or upload their favourite music, as it is possible to do on YouTube. Vimeo is in that sense only a provider of UGC. Vimeo is also very clear about the purpose for joining, which is to share audiovisual creativity and not "vernacular" creativity, which Burgess and Green associate with YouTube (cf. 2009). Vimeo was originally a site for filmmakers, but as they state: "As time went on, like-minded people came to the site and built a community of positive, encouraging individuals with a wide range of video interests" (Vimeo's homepage). At the same time, Vimeo distances itself explicitly from the so-called "haters" – users who write negative and hateful comments regarding the videos. Although YouTube also removes inappropriate comments, the tone of debate is different on Vimeo in comparison to YouTube. Many of the videos have moreover their focus point on aesthetic expressions rather than on the interaction and presentation of individuals. Filmmaker's traditional interest in aesthetics also is more visible concerning Vimeo's design of its website, which has much greater graphic emphasis than YouTube. This is also underlined by the fact that most videos identify and reflect on the technological equipment used for making the video, i.e., camera specifics and editorial software. Hence, Vimeo seems to attract a more specific audience than YouTube, where the same types of video of course also exist, but in closed, more private forums that are not among the most popular content as seems to be the case on Vimeo.

[4] Retrieved from Vimeo's homepage 22 September 2011. See: http://vimeo.com/guidelines.

The distinction between theses sites as well as Dailymotion can be illustrated in a general demographic comparison between the three websites retrieved from alexa.com:

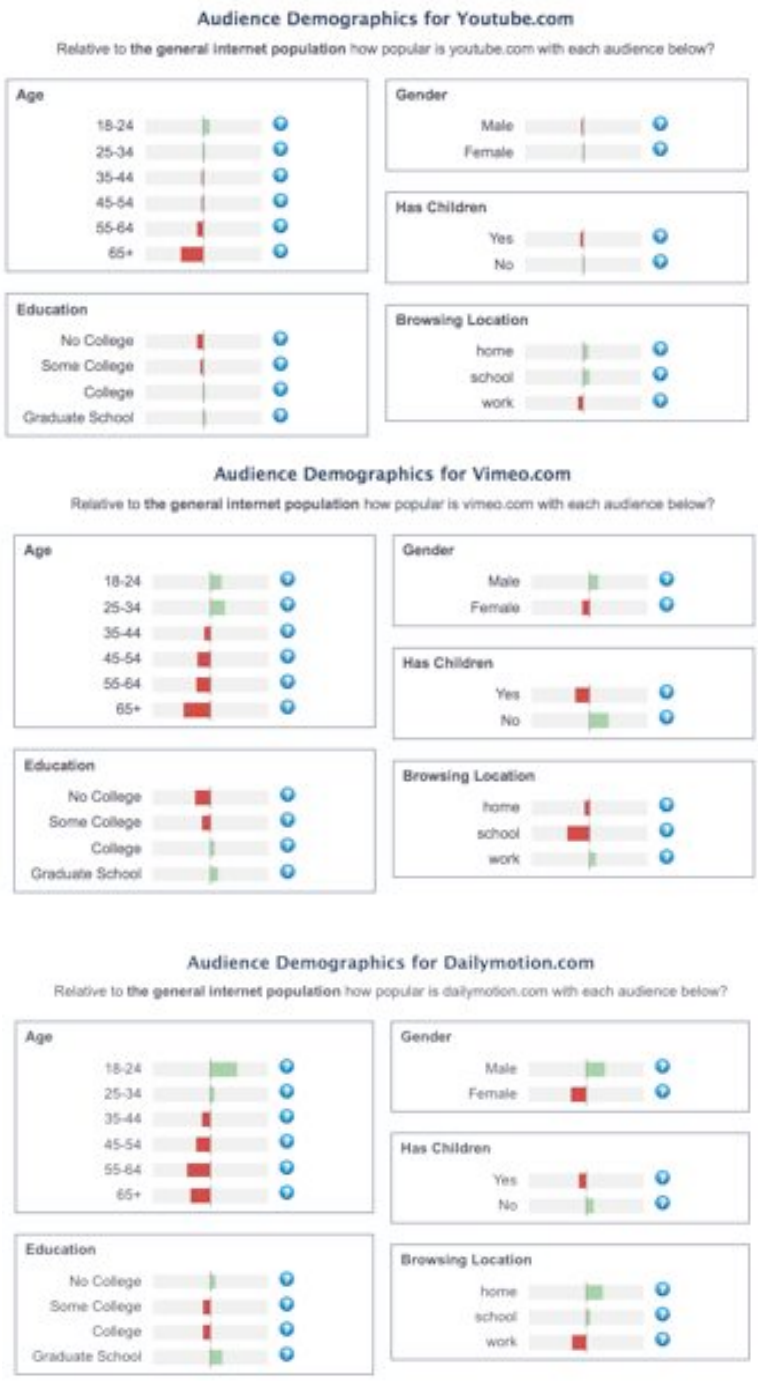


Figure 1: *A comparison of the audience demographics of YouTube, Vimeo and Dailymotion*

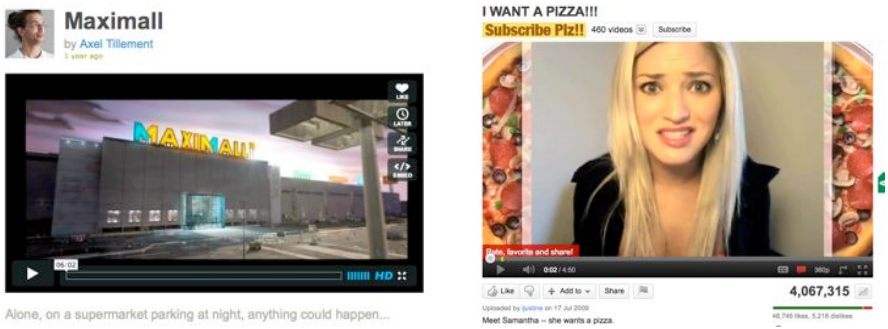
There is an indication of differences between the sites in terms of age of users; YouTube is dominated by both men and women between 18-24 years. On Vimeo, the largest group is men between 25-34, and the location of consumption and level of education are accordingly different. On Dailymotion, the audience is even younger and as noted earlier highly dominated by males, watching content at home.

This comparison also indicates that while users of YouTube are very much representative of the "general Internet population", the users of both Vimeo and Dailymotion are more distinct.

Therefore, if we want to discuss online identity formation and social behaviour with reference to the general population of the Internet, YouTube provides a better representative sample. Although, this is not to suggest that by studying YouTube we automatically can say something about the Internet in general.

Another argument for using YouTube is also what appears to be a general focus on people (following the motto of YouTube: *Broadcast yourself*) rather than their expressive creativity behind the camera, as is the case with much of the content on Vimeo, since social behaviour and explicit self-presentation are the main focus points.

One remaining question is then would we find the same behavioural patterns and presentations of the self on other sites? Most likely not in the specific form, because we cannot talk about the content without focusing on the paratextual layers of communication and specific affordances that are unique on YouTube. The interfaces of the different websites also influence the behavioural patterns generated in the content. For example, as shown in Figure 2, it is clear that YouTube in comparison to Vimeo pays more attention to the quantitative data, i.e., view counts and likes/dislikes, which on Vimeo is less conspicuous:



Screen shoot of *Vimeo* 22.09.11 **Screen shoot of *YouTube* 22.09.11**

Figure 2: *Comparison between the screens of Vimeo and YouTube*

A noticeable difference between the presentations of the two videos is also the information regarding the presenter. In the Vimeo video, the creator is clearly visually positioned as creator of the video, thus emphasising the creator's role as filmmaker. On YouTube, only a small name below the video illustrates the acknowledgment of a person as creator. The creator is instead visualised in the video itself, which indicates that in many YouTube videos, like the one in Figure 2, there is not much distance between the content and the creator. Acknowledgement and ratings of videos is thus synonymous with self-presentation and self-appearance. The creator exists within the content as an audiovisual representation of the self, not as a distant creator presenting oneself through aesthetic expressions as on Vimeo.

2.7 The screen of YouTube

Perhaps it is constructive to understand what is meant by content on YouTube since there are many different ways of viewing a video. If we consider how YouTube presents and organises the content for its users, it becomes clear that people are not just watching a video, but taking in information and data as well. As illustrated in Figure 3 below, you are looking at an Internet page that presents the video screen together with commercials, titles of videos with view counts and pictures that function as links to other videos. Viewers are also reading written user-comments and statistics that potentially can affect Viewers' choices. As a viewer of YouTube, you are automatically provided with information about the success of the video in terms of number of views, number of likes and dislikes, and an easy overview of the best comments decided by other users. In that sense, before viewers start watching the specific video, the meta-data surrounding the video signals whether viewers are liable to like the video or not. If we take a look at the video *I haven't eaten in 4 days!*, the rather large number of views indicates that quite a lot of viewers have watched it. The large amount of likes (7,075) and only 375 dislikes strongly indicate that this video is worth watching (cf. Figure 3). It is not the intention to empirically measure the effect of these meta-data, but rather to demonstrate that the YouTube interface and thereby YouTube as a media platform is different from the consumption of similar content on television.

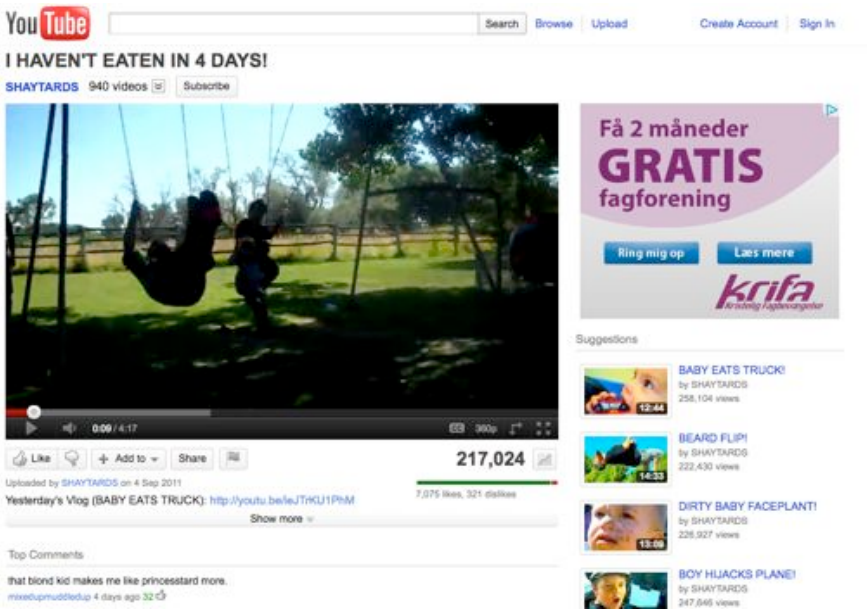


Figure 3: *Frame grab of the website screen of YouTube when streaming a video*

This can be further elaborated if we look at Figure 3. The figure illustrates the difference between watching audiovisual content on YouTube and on for example television (of course one can choose full screen, but the standard format is as shown in Figure 3). On YouTube, watching a video thus involves several simultaneous actions such as watching the commercial, reading comments, selecting other videos. Users can also choose to access their accounts or search for other content through the search function. Finally users can also click on "the statistics" button next to the view count and receive demographic data about the video. Overall, this exemplifies that making sense and navigating on YouTube may seem a simple task, but they involve many different processes that can also be compared to the multitasking activities that will be emphasised in regards to the relationship between television and YouTube.

My focus will be on the specific video, but as illustrated in the figure, the information around the video cannot be ignored when discussing and analysing content on YouTube. For some of the examples that will be analysed later, demographic data and comments will also be included. Of course, with several thousands of comments linked to each video, the use of comments can never be a sufficient representative of the reception context of each video.

Besides being a specific audiovisual discourse presented on YouTube in this specific form, videos on YouTube are products and reflections of texts from other media, such as Music Videos and Television Highlights. This means that we must also consider these media when we analyse content on YouTube.

2.8 Exterior linking

A final issue that is in need of clarification is the possibility of exterior viewing of videos. Most videos can be found on other websites; through linking from, e.g., online newspapers and soft-news programmes on television as well as Facebook and Twitter, these are linked to YouTube. Most videos are attached with statistical data, and it is therefore possible to examine the video's specific referrals. This data is rather complex to collect, since it needs to be counted from the different links that can be found within the data as shown in the figure below:

	Date	Event	Views
A	05/09/2011	First referral from related video – DIRTY BABY FACEPLANT!	1,972
B	04/09/2011	First referral from a subscriber module	76,224
C	04/09/2011	First view from a mobile device	48,920
D	04/09/2011	First referral from YouTube – www.youtube.com/	42,888
E	04/09/2011	First referral from related video – BABY EATS TRUCK!	3,107
F	04/09/2011	First referral from YouTube – www.youtube.com/user/SHAYTARDS	2,157
G	04/09/2011	First referral from YouTube – www.youtube.com/user /SHAYTARDS?blend=1&ob=5	1,669
H	04/09/2011	First referral from – www.facebook.com	1,153
I	04/09/2011	First referral from YouTube – www.youtube.com/user /SHAYTARDS?feature=chclk	698

Figure 4: *Overview of exterior views of the video: I haven't eaten in 4 days!*

The video reveals 1,153 registered views from Facebook. This accounts for approximately 0.53% of the overall 217,000 views (cf. Figure 3), and it seems to be the only significant registration of exterior links in the video. Another registration is 48,920 views deriving from a mobile device. This, however, does not tell anything about the site of streaming that we must assume is YouTube, but it is an interesting aspect in another investigation of how and where YouTube content is consumed.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to track the statistical data of each video, but a random check of the different videos from the sample reveals that many videos have not received any noticeable views from exterior links. A small number of videos with primarily sensational clips of music and film celebrities, who are famous beyond the YouTube community, represents roughly 20% of the views accounted from exterior links, while most of the videos that were randomly checked have less than 5% of their views from exterior links. This also supports the data of Cha et al. (2007), who demonstrated (although back in 2007) that exterior linking accounts for only 3% of total views on YouTube (2007, p.3). It is therefore assumed that the exterior links do not have any significant influence on the organisation of content on YouTube.

These aspects of information and data surrounding YouTube as well as ethical issues have demonstrated the complexity of YouTube and the many difference parameters that must be taken into consideration when analysing the content of the site. It has moreover been argued why YouTube is the most suitable online streaming site for this investigation and in the following I will go into detail regarding the sample and coding process.

The overall initial step for this coding process will be to answer two straightforward questions: *1) What is the content about and 2) How is it communicated?* Through an investigation of content, including an overall distinction of UGC and non-UGC, different UGC genres, specific UGC related keywords, the relationship between fiction and non-fiction, I argue it is possible to identify and clarify different forms of self-presentations and provide an overview of how UGC can be identified and characterised.

3. The sample

This sampling began with a very wide-scaled intention of understanding YouTube as a phenomenon of audiovisual communication. Within a pre-defined context, the intention was to investigate how traditional documentary forms are being represented on YouTube and furthermore to demonstrate how these forms reflect different modes of self-presentations on YouTube. It quickly became clear that in order to do so, some kind of measurable overview was needed. Such an overview is rather difficult to obtain simply by collecting content through typing in search words on documentary. Instead, I turned towards the two available categorical browsing forms on YouTube: the pre-defined categories of content and the categories of the most popular content. The first browsing form quickly proved to be insufficient and too narrowed by random thematic tags. The latter is also the research focus of other studies of YouTube (cf. Landry and Guzdial 2008, Burgess and Green 2009), providing the possibility of collecting what can be considered a somewhat representative sample of the most popular content of YouTube.

3.1 Sample design

The foundation of the current sample was provided by an observation of 900 videos during the summer of 2009. The 900 videos were collected in the available search categories among the most popular content on YouTube's website. The categories are all based on a hierarchical system of promoted content as a result of different aspects of viewer activity. This includes user activity such as viewing, rating (the percentage of positive ratings), discussions (the number of comments added to a video), subscriptions (refers to subscribing to specific channels), video responding and favouriting (the act of saving a video on your personal YouTube account).

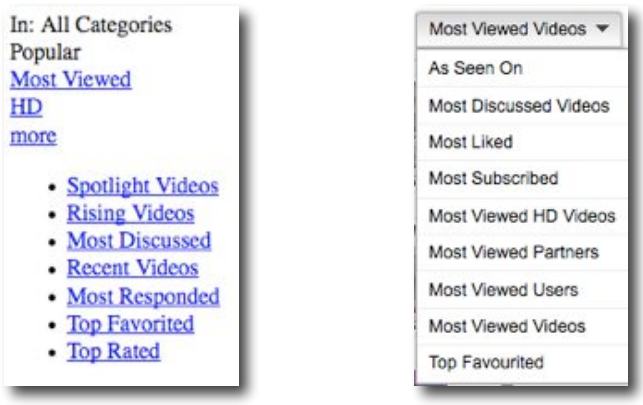


Figure 5: *Retrieved through the "Way-back" machine of YouTube.com in July 2009*

The categories have changed since 2009, as illustrated by the table of available categories of YouTube in 2011 (Figure 5). But from the available categories of 2009, I selected three groups: "Most Viewed" videos, "Most Discussed" videos and the "Top Rated" videos. I could also have included other categories, such as "Top Favourited" or "Most Responded", but it seemed less obvious what these groups represented, whereas the groups selected reflected the aspects of quantitative representation (most views), most interactive in terms of immediate user-response (most discussed) and an indication of the quality of the videos based on ratings. These indications seem less obvious in the other categories. The subscription category refers to the whole channel of a creator and not to the specific

video (as the video is automatically linked to subscribers, it gives no confirmation whether the video is actually being watched). The "Top Favourited" category could also have been included, but it indicates less a choice of rating, than other factors and reasons that users want to save, most likely for quality reasons, but also for opposite reasons. Finally, I chose the "Most Discussed" as an example of user-interaction rather than the "Most Responded", because comment writing is a much more widespread form of user-interaction than video responding. There are furthermore many examples of how responding is being used as a distribution mode for creators to link and turn attention towards previous or following videos. At the same time, comments provide a more varied perspective of users' interactions as well as understanding of videos.

The 900 videos collected in 2009 were pre-coded, i.e., they were registered without any categorically defined coding-schema, but rather were used as initial observations in order to design a coding scheme. The sample being analysed in the dissertation derives from a similar collection of 900 videos from June-August 2010, also collected within the three-above-mentioned categories: "Most Viewed", "Most Discussed" and "Top Rated". In 2011, the "Most Viewed" and "Most Discussed" categories were still in use on YouTube, while the "Top Rated" had been replaced by "Most Liked". The old YouTube website, that is, until September 2010, had a star rating system, which would let users rate videos on a 1-5 scale. This has been replaced by two choices: either "Thumbs Up" or Thumbs Down". This was introduced in March 2010 and has now completely replaced the old rating system. The category is thus no longer called "Top Rated", but "Most Liked".

The reasons for this change are not clear, but according to YouTube[5], it was done to let creators more easily identify their audience. Another consequence is that ratings are more closely linked to the number of views than before, since "the thumbs up" covers a wide range of quality approval. Therefore, videos with high ratings most likely would be more attractive for advertisers and investors.

The most viewed, of course, covers the quantitatively most represented group. This group, at the time of collection (June 29, 2010), included videos with as many views as 285,000,000. This number, as of January 2012, has reached more than 696,000,000 for the highest number of views of a YouTube video. With this browsing system, YouTube provides browsing categories of content that represent the most popular content measured in terms of viewing, user-interaction as well as user ratings in a specific period of time; i.e., between 29 June 2010 and 2 August 2010.

3.1.1 The representativeness of the sample

The different aspects of popularity within the browsing categories inevitably lead to the question of how representative the sample is. For television, a programme's popularity is measured solely by quantitative ratings in terms of number of viewers. This is not the case on YouTube. User interaction by means of discussion, subscription and qualitative ratings are equally weighted with viewing counts, although the "viewing" category is now the only popular category that pops up on YouTube's website after YouTube changed their design in September 2010. Although the emphasis on "the most viewed today" arguably changes the hierarchy of the popular content, the data gathered for this sample at the specific time of collection will nevertheless be considered representative of the most popular content on YouTube at that specific time.

Each of the three main groups are divided into temporal groups, which are also available on the YouTube main website. I have used the categories of: a) "All Time", b) "This Month" and c) "Today". For example, the most viewed group (from the first sample collected in the summer of 2009) contains

[5] The change and argument for changing is described in this YouTube advertisement: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Iiztu3JrxI&feature=player_embedded#at=20.

300 videos including the 100 videos most viewed of all time, the 100 videos of most viewed this month and the 100 videos of most viewed today. Through this temporal distinction, both old and new videos are included in the sample in order to broaden the data, including types of videos that would potentially be less popular in the future and therefore less likely to appear in the sample, if the focus for example had only been on the "All Time" category.

The temporal distinction furthermore extends the data in an attempt to avoid a too narrow and homogenous sample. This sample would most likely be too narrow if the sample had only contained temporal groups of "Today", which, e.g., normally contain the latest sports highlights typically dominating the most viewed on, e.g., Mondays after weekend football matches, along with other current news or incidents in society (e.g., natural disasters or controversial news) that are given a lot of media attention. In order to broaden the sample, the "This Month" and "All Time" categories were also included.

This results in an initial sample consisting of 900 videos divided into three overall groups that furthermore are divided into three distinctive temporal groups. Thus, there are the following nine sample groups, each consisting of 100 videos:

Figure 6: *The nine sample groups*

These groups were subsequently coded in a coding scheme designed in *File Maker Pro 11*. The videos were identified through frame grabbing, as illustrated in the example in the figure below. Through title, length and sender, each video was identified and coded in the scheme.

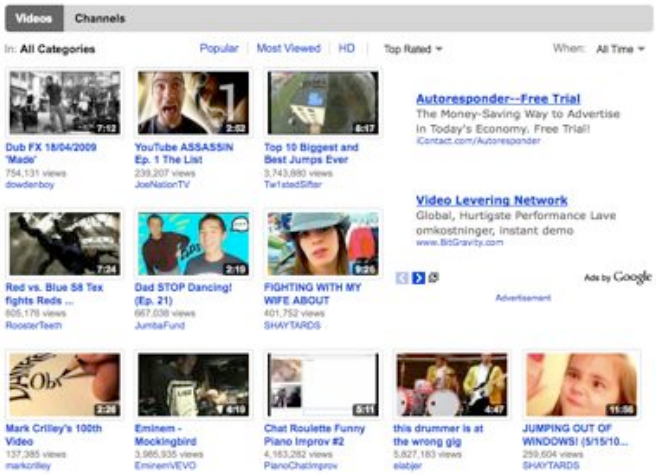


Figure 7: *Extract of 11 videos in group 9) The Top Rated Videos of All Time - collected on YouTube, August 2, 2010*

Due to copyright claims, some videos were removed shortly after being uploaded and in the following coding process they were therefore no longer available. Since many of the videos were collected during a specific period of time, there were also several duplicates. This leaves a sample of 737 videos, excluding duplicates and non-identifiable content.

3.1.2 Coding scheme

Based on these observations, I designed a coding scheme in the database programme *FileMaker Pro* that proved to be suitable for the coding. It also meant that the videos could only be represented by textual coding and not by downloading the videos. But based on the combination of information from the frame grab files of the browsing categories, such as those in Figure 7, it was easy to return to each video. The coding scheme below shows how each video is filed in the records, and can be found through creating search bottoms and adding selection features to the file as shown in the scheme:

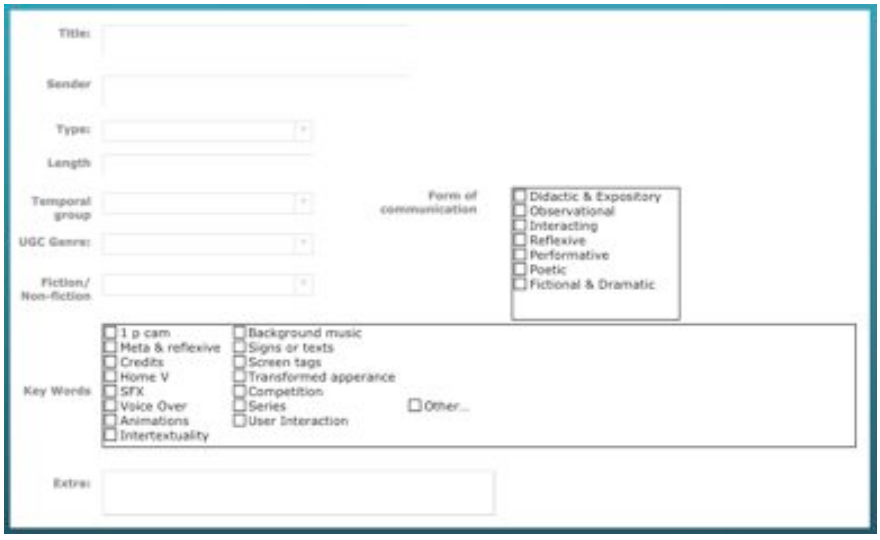


Figure 8: *Coding Scheme*

Each of the components will be discussed in detail on the following pages. The first aspect is the identification of overall "types", followed by the general distinction of overall types of content (illustrated in Figure 10).

3.2 Four main types of content

Most previous studies (cf. Landry and Guzdial 2008, Burgess and Green 2009 and Strangelove 2010) include an overall distinction between user-generated content (UGC) and professionally made content. Accordingly, I have differentiated the content in four overall types that are considered either UGC or Non-UGC. I have registered two overall forms of non-UGC, which includes television highlights (TVH) and music videos (MV). I have also differentiated UGC from Mashups that are considered UGC, but in many ways a fundamentally different type (cf. *The Mashups of YouTube*), which made a distinction preferable.

Following the recent developments of content production on YouTube, the difference between ordinary users and professional media producers is decreasing, and inevitably the question posed will be whether it still is possible to identify a distinction since so much content can no longer be properly labelled amateur content. At the same time, professional media producers increasingly adopt amateur styles resulting in a melting pot of content created by a merging group of producers. There are nevertheless still useful ways of distinguishing concerning agency, distributions and perhaps most significantly the communicative approach to YouTube and its viewers.

The increasing number of creators of UGC is to a certain extent recognisable in terms of self-appearance, their choice of domestic settings and thematic reflections on everyday life. Non-UGC in most cases lacks the direct contact with the viewer in terms of user-interaction (e.g., encouragement for tags, subscriptions and competitions), since these are predominantly derived from other existing media platforms. In that sense, non-UGC can be distinguished from UGC in relation to the form of distribution, but moreover through a focus on agency (concrete in terms of identifying the sender; e.g., CNN or Hollywood Records). Finally, a more overall distinction, which can also be related to agency, is a distinction between what we can regard as popular content limited to YouTube and mass media content. UGC is limited in the sense that it does not exist beyond the borders of YouTube. Very few outside the YouTube community have heard about YouTube celebrities like *RayWilliamJohnson, The Shaytards, Shane Dawson, BrittaniLouiseTaylor or PhillipDeFranco.* In contrast, pop stars such as Lady Gaga and Beyoncé or television phenomenon such as Susan Doyle are famous on a global scale, far beyond the borders of YouTube (e.g., on other media platforms like radio, magazines, television programmes etc.). A distinction based on the celebrity status outside the YouTube community can be a useful indicator, but is not sufficient, since a great deal of professionally made content does not exclusively involve celebrities; additionally, UGC in contrast can combine already existing content that may reflect upon celebrities, but nonetheless is UGC (e.g., in Mashups or Parodies).

Music Videos (MV)

The main group identified as music videos (MV) accounts for 12% of the content in the sample (cf. Figure 10). MV dominate as the most-viewed group and represent the quantitatively highest number of views among the different types of videos. They mirror the top-20 charts of the most popular pop-music and therefore attract a much wider spectre of audiences worldwide. Even though the high numbers of views are vulnerable to manipulation (e.g., by record companies, who attempt to cheat with the numbers through fake links), in a simple comparison between a music video of Lady Gaga – e.g., *Bad Romance* – and the YouTube celebrity *Fred* – in the UGC *Fred Goes Swimming* – we see a tendency that applies for many music videos, i.e., they have a global audience, while most UGC are primarily

consumed by an English speaking audience. There are also popular Brazilian and German UGC videos, for example, but like the example with *Fred*, they are limited to a national audience unified by language, also suggesting that oral communication both within and regarding the content is very important. This moreover indicates a geographically more homogenous audience of UGC than for music videos.

Lady Gaga – Bad Romance (400 million views) *Fred: Goes Swimming* (55 million views)

Figure 9: *Geographical comparison between MV and UGC*

The most established MV are distributed through the music syndicate VEVO, which is a joint venture between three major record companies (Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and EMI) and Google. This partnership has made VEVO the largest YouTube channel with more than 13 billion channel views[6]. VEVO organises the music videos and coordinates the promotion of all their videos.

The predominance of VEVO is also becoming significantly more visible. VEVO in this sample is the uploader of 8% of the videos in the "most viewed of all time" category (gr. 3, cf. Figure 6), while a quick count of videos being uploaded by VEVO in the exact same category, for October 2011, reveals that 60% of the videos in this category are now being uploaded by VEVO.

Television Highlights (TVH)

The second group of videos made by professionals is the television highlights (TVH) group and it accounts for around 11% of the content in the overall sample. Like MV, TVH dominate the quantitatively most viewed videos. TVH differ from MV by frequently being uploaded by ordinary users. Users, however, do not make these videos and they are therefore not UGC. TVH are categorised through a combination of registering user identity, as well as thematically and aesthetically identifying the content. A great deal of TVH is uploaded in an unedited form by ordinary users who distribute the content. This content can be determined by television logos and professional studio-setups. TVH include both reflections of events taking place in the present public culture (such as sports, cultural and political events) and historic and media archive material. Like MV, TVH reflect on contemporary popular culture.

Although a lot of TVH fulfils an informative role of providing news or information, TVH include footage with strong emotional or funny content. This includes for example the performance of Susan Boyle in *Britain's Got Talent 2009*, which is one of the most popular TVH on YouTube. TVH like those in this specific example can also be distinguished from UGC by their integration of a more complex line of narrative, as is the case with the Susan Boyle video. During its 5 min duration, the video manages, mainly through well-done editing, to tell a Cinderella story of a woman who is judged by her appearance (through the clips of negative audience and the stereotyped expectation of the judges); but she shows everybody that you should not judge a book by its cover. Although videos cannot be

[6] See this article: http://techcrunch.com/2010/01/13/youtube-vevo-overtake-myspace-music/.

identified solely through narrative structure, there is a clear tendency that more complex montages and narrative structures are primarily found within TVH or MV. This also includes the use of a studio setup and the well-performed camera movements and special effects that many creators of UGC cannot afford or choose not to use in order to maintain a specific style and aesthetic.

Finally, very few of the MV and TVH integrate the communicative affordances of YouTube, whereas many UGC include tags, encouragement for subscribing or other examples of texts, signs and competitions. Instead, MV and TVH reflect on more traditional forms of audiovisual streaming. This also explains why we find most of the TVH and MV in the category of most viewed content (gr. 1-3 cf. Figure 6), which mirrors a functionality of content streaming (cf. *7.7.*).

TVH constitute two types of content. The first are videos with immediate novelty value, mirroring what is going on at a specific moment, like sports events that can be measured in the most viewed of today on Mondays or concrete news stories that are only popular for a short period of time and then ignored. The other group consists of emotional videos that contain and show special occasions similar to the so-called "YouTube Moments" as I will return to in regards to specific UGC genres (cf. *3.4*).

UGC

UGC is the main focus of this dissertation, since it is within this type of content we find the more interesting examples and most predominant forms of self-display and online identity in which people use audiovisuality text to present themselves.

As mentioned in the introduction, the term UGC developed along with the emergence of new social media and fundamentally describes the idea of ordinary users as creators of media content. UGC in regards to YouTube can also be stressed, because UGC creators use YouTube as their main distribution platform. They are defined within the YouTube community and by changing this relationship, their status changes as well. This does not mean that a reference in an article or an appearance on a television show fundamentally changes the status of the producer of UGC; but when creators of UGC start to create content that is distributed and consumed on another media platform as a primary distribution platform, they will not be considered creators of UGC. As argued earlier, the term "amateur", however, is not appropriate for many creators, because they produce content on YouTube as a profession. Juxtaposed with many established media producers and large companies, ordinary users have increasingly placed themselves in a position where they earn money by producing videos, and where video production thus has become a profession.

The professional amateur has become a major player and contributor to the cultural and economic value of YouTube. With the increasing visibility of professional YouTube creators, there is a growing need to make a distinction between the "professional" and non-professional "amateurs". Only a few non-professional creators have found their way into the sample analysed here, since the parameters of the popular content is very much synonymous with the parameters of what defines a professional YouTuber. Although, I have identified content produced by professional YouTubers in terms of their status as YouTube Partners, which I will return to in *3.9*), I have not made an overall distinction between UGC and non-UGC. Videos produced by non-professional YouTubers and YouTube Partners are both placed in the categories of UGC and Mashups. A distinction, however, is made in the following keyword registrations, where YouTube Partner status is ascertained.

Mashups

The Mashups have been the most difficult category to code. Mashups may contain content similar to TVH, but they are different in terms of the presence of a creative voice in regards to editing skills and

the act of re-combining already existing audiovisual content. Mashups have been re-worked and re-defined in contrast to TVH that has been uploaded without any other uploader-involvement. The Mashups can thus quite easily be distinguished from non-UGC. The difficult task has been to differentiate these videos from ordinary UGC. Mashups could admittedly have been coded as a specific genre alongside other forms of UGC, but they simultaneously differ in terms of their explicit transformation of meaning and remediating status. In their construction, Mashups resemble examples of collage and bricolage as they integrate an editing style analogous to early example of montage, such as those created by Dziga Vertov in the early 1920s. But more importantly, Mashups transform ordinary content into a creative expression that can be identified as being different from traditional forms of creativity through their articulation of a social community that is communicated much more implicitly in regular UGC, as also stated in the article *The Mashups of YouTube*.

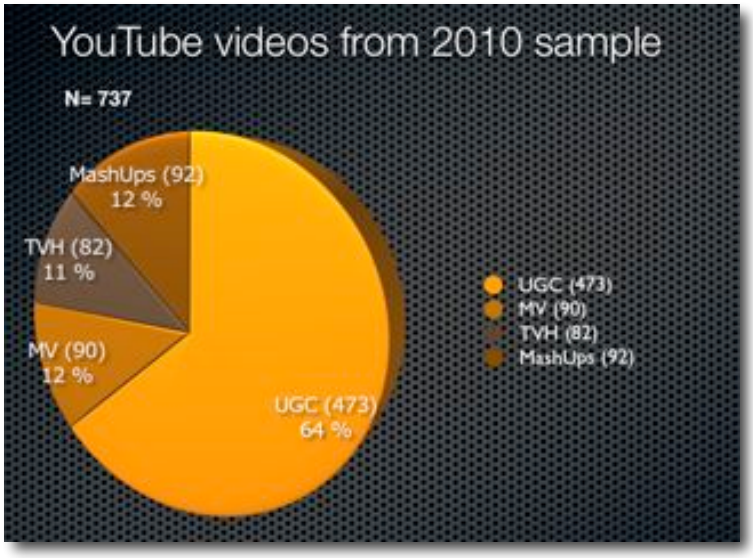


Figure 10: *Content differentiated by overall type*

The pie chart displayed in Figure 10 shows that UGC is clearly the most popular content, while non-UGC (TVH and MV) altogether accounts for 23% of the sample. This also supports the previous registrations conducted by Landry and Guzdial (2008) and Burgess and Green (2009). Their registrations, however, indicated a more equal division of UGC and non-UGC, whereas the proportion of UGC in this sample in comparison to their findings is greater. One explanation is the fact that with 60 hours of upload every minute on YouTube, the amount of UGC is growing enormously. Another factor is that YouTube did not introduce their Partner Programme to ordinary creators until 2009, while the two other studies are drawing on data collected in 2007 and 2008. This sample includes content of primarily YouTube Partners (84% of the creators of UGC are registered YouTube Partners (cf. *3.9*) and the most popular content of YouTube is inherently connected to promoted creators of UGC. The predominance is also reflected in the three selected groups of popular categories. As Figure 11 reveals, there is a difference between the most viewed group and the two other groups. The distinction changes accordingly with each category, where non-UGC is significantly better represented in the most viewed category in comparison to the two other categories:

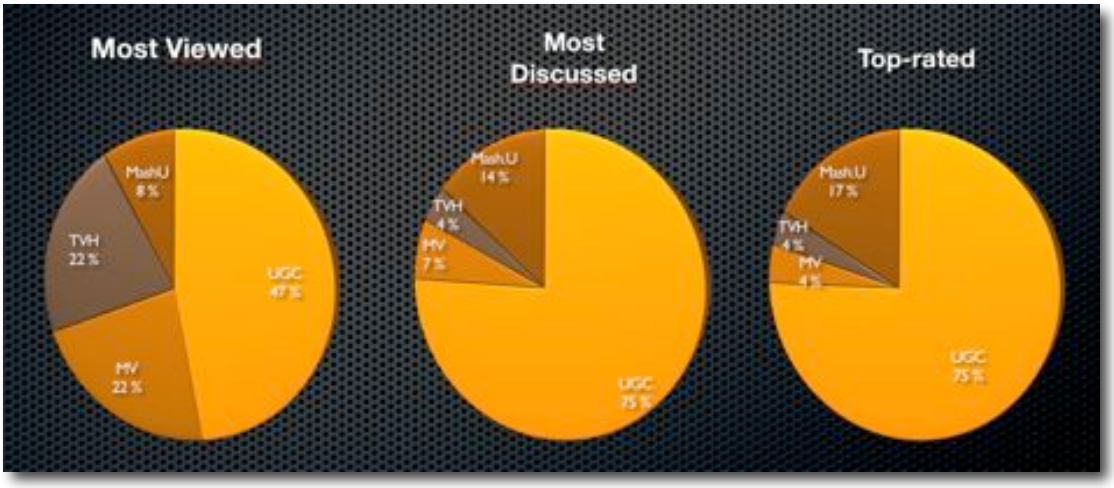


Figure 11: *Content type divided by browsing categorises*

Viewers are more engaged with UGC than with TVH or MV, as can be seen in the user-interactive categories that include comment writing (defining the most discussed category) and rating the videos (defining the top-rated category). These different categories are reflections of different levels of participation. Viewers do not need to be registered in order for their viewing to be counted as views, whereas viewers need to be registered in order to comment or rate a video. Therefore, the most viewed category involves potentially all different levels of participating, while the two other categories only involve either commenting or content creating users who are registered YouTube members. This distinction also indicates that popularity on YouTube must be differentiated between the status of popularity in terms of the content of TVH and MV and the more medium specific popularity of UGC. Creators and actors in non-UGC are known outside of the YouTube community, while the celebrities of YouTube are famous first and foremost within the community thus potentially communicating to a quantitatively smaller audience. This is somewhat of a paradoxical picture of the most popular UGC on YouTube, since it is only popular within the perimeters of YouTube in contrast to TVH and MV. This paradox furthermore underlines the dependence and frequent articulation of the so-called YouTube community (cf. *8.1*), which is often addressed by many of the YouTubers in the sample as their shared public institution, just as knowledge of this community is needed in order to understand much of what is going on in the content.

The predominance of UGC among the "most discussed" and "top rated" videos indicates a more engaging role for both the YouTube creators and viewers. People take greater interest in discussing and rating videos made by "amateurs" (UGC) rather than videos made by "professionals" (MV and TVH) and seem to be much more involved with the videos characterising the reception process as more symmetric in terms of active respondents (defined by the measureable interaction through ratings and discussions of videos). The viewers that are mainly watching YouTube without necessarily being involved in the actual videos seem to have a tendency to watch more television highlights and music videos. The predominance of music videos (mainly the US top 20) in the "most viewed" category also reveals YouTube as a commercial broadcast site, where people use the platform as a regular streaming platform without being involved other than through the possibility of revealing personal taste by favouring the video.

This tendency is relativised by the fact that the temporal groups, i.e., "most discussed", "most viewed" and "top-rated", in the "all time" group represent a much larger number of users than the "today" groups, even though the top-rated and most-discussed groups overall have the same proportion of

UGC in all three temporal groups ("all time", "this month" and "today"). But the majority of music videos in the "most viewed" group differ noticeably between the "today" (0%) group and "all time" (74%). This large disparity can partly be explained by the copyright infringement that prevented many from accessing music videos outside the US, during the spring and summer of 2009-2010 and which has affected the number of hits[7]. The huge divergence, i.e., content between most viewed "today" and "all time", also illustrates the relevance of involving temporal distinctions in order to analyse tendencies on YouTube.

Finally, it is also important to mention that this distinction is measured after the removal of duplicates, where duplicates from the most viewed categories may have reappeared in the two other categories, but in terms of duplication have been removed from the sample. Nevertheless, if this division differs slightly, most of the MV and TVH indisputably appear in the "most viewed" categories. This seems to be a tendency that is growing accordingly, including the fact that many music producers have acknowledged the advantages of the VOD system in comparison with "old" television stations, such as MTV, who no longer show music videos. Furthermore, most music videos on YouTube are no longer constrained by copyright infringements, since most producers have signed the VEVO agreement.

For the purpose of identifying social behaviour within UGC, in the following I shall elaborate on the 473 videos that were coded as UGC, but before doing this I will briefly reflect on the registrations of length.

[7] Mentioned by BBC in this article: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8234125.stm.

3.3 Length

The duration of content on YouTube seems at first glance to be influenced by the maximum length limit provided by YouTube and adjusted according to the development of Internet broadband speeds. YouTube introduced a 10-minute limit in 2006, which was replaced by 15-minute limit in 2010 (cf. Lowensohn 2010). However, companies such as MGM and CBS have been permitted to post full-length films and series since 2008 (cf. Wikipedia), and there is no longer any time limit for YouTube Partners (cf. YouTube.com[8]). But, as illustrated in Figure 12 below, the average length of YouTube content is far from the even previous maximum limit of 10 minutes and the impact of YouTube's official limitations thus does not seem to have a noticeable impact on the format, although it can be assumed that individual uploaders' broadband speeds have increased and thus made it easier to upload longer videos. The chart in Figure 12 illustrates the medium length of videos in each of the four main groups; the average time for a video in this sample is 262 seconds.

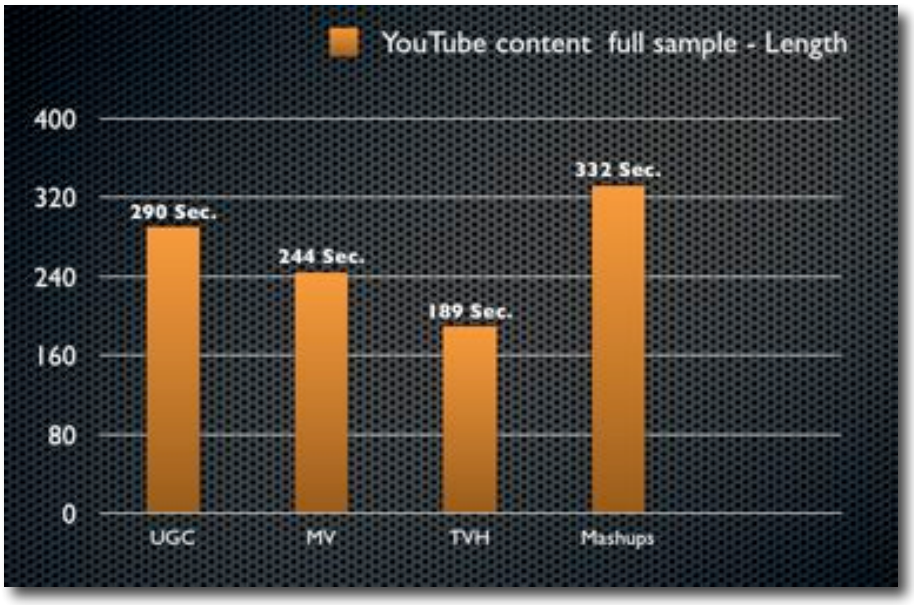


Figure 12: *Average length by overall content type*

The chart suggests that the running time of YouTube content is specifically related to the content as a unique type of content. The average length of MV is very much in line with an already existing music video format with a standard around 4 minutes. But with the possibility of posting full episodes and full programmes, the shortest format, i.e., television highlights (TVH), signals a somewhat different usage of television content. The short format of TVH can be explained by an immediate and compressed informative characteristic usage. A TVH first and foremost shows an emotional depiction of a situation that is assumedly recognisable and viewers are in no need of background information, but can understand what is going on simply by watching the video.

The registration of length was thought of as a practical tool of identification in the coding process, but it also proved as documentation of the developments on YouTube regarding non-UGC and UGC. A previous investigation of YouTube content stated that professionally produced content was noticeably longer than UGC. Gijs Kruitbosch and Frank Nack conclude in their paper *Broadcast yourself on YouTube – Really?* that "user-edited content is considerably shorter than professional edited content" (2008, p. 2).

[8] See: http://www.google.com/support/youtube/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=1061460.

Their argument draws on an investigation of 1080 videos of the most viewed and most recently uploaded. Referring to the current observation of UGC with an average length on 290 seconds, I argue this is no longer the case. A main reason for this discrepancy is perhaps their distinction between UGC and non-UGC, which is somewhat misleading, entirely based on technical parameters, thus excluding a large amount of content produced by ordinary UGC who simply have adopted a more "professional" look. Another reason is that their investigation was performed in 2008 and in terms of running time, development clearly signals movement towards longer running times. And as stated earlier, Molyneaux et al. (2008) used a 3-minute limit for the content they investigated, which according to the findings presented in Figure 12 would exclude a great deal of content as evidenced by the average length of 290 seconds for UGC.

Even though the average length of UGC is not close to the limit of 10 minutes, the average of 290 seconds is longer than other studies of similar content have registered, e.g., Landry and Guzdial (2008), who reported an average length of 3.71 minutes/video (approx. 225 seconds). Finally, the videos with the longest format are the Mashups, with an average length of 332 seconds. One preliminary explanation is that the Mashup group is dominated by computer-game videos that have an average length of the actual computer game being played (for instance, the sample contains many video Mashups of the computer game *Modern Warfare 2*, which has an average duration close to 10 minutes).

Overall, the registration of length has shown that content is not dictated by the restrictions of YouTube's official standards, but rather that the registered lengths, with the exception of MV, support the argument that YouTube videos, despite being remediations of already existing content, are also somewhat unique formats adjusted for distribution and consumption. Further, in comparison with previous studies of UGC length, the current data indicate that UGC is getting increasingly longer.

3.4 The forms of UGC

As part of this dissertation, a typological investigation of different forms of UGC was presented in the article *Categorising YouTube*. Therefore I will not dwell on the approach and analysis of isolating and identifying different forms of UGC, but briefly summarise and elaborate on some of the different types of UGC and the purpose for doing so.

The main benefit of integrating a taxonomic analysis of UGC was the methodological outcome that enabled the identification and isolation of specific forms of UGC. This has lead to an identification of certain types of content that are specially concerned with the presentation of the self, which is the main analytical focus of this dissertation. Before getting back to that focus, however, I will introduce the different types of UGC that have been identified here.

Since I chose not to use the already existing categories, as they appear too thematically tied and in many ways misleading, as also argued in *Categorising YouTube,* I decided to create new categories partly based on the initial observational phase examining videos in 2009. The definition of different UGC forms also correspond somewhat with already existing terms. In their registration of storytelling elements, Landry and Guzdial organize the videos using four main types of UGC. These are: "Activism/Outreach" (36%), "Instructional Videos" (3%), "Performance/Exhibition" (60%) and "Experiment" (1%). Some of these, I argue, are problematic and in need of revision.

Landry and Guzdial describe "Activism/Outreach" as a type of video that "implored viewers to perform activities related to a topic. They also requested video responses related to a topic" (2008, p. 4). I found this category difficult to apply to only one type of content, since user-interaction takes place on many different levels and across what are clearly different forms of UGC. Instead, I argue that the

user-interaction and video responding are more comprehensive when understood as affordance-based keyword registrations. (In the next chapter I will provide a definition of the affordance term.) Their category "Instructional Videos" is easier to identify, and it basically corresponds to what I refer to as the "How To" category also reflecting YouTube's already existing category "Howto&Style". Landry and Guzdial register most videos in their category "Performance/Exhibition", consisting of videos:

> (…) that showcased the talent of a person in music, storytelling, dance, martial arts and other abilities. It also included videos that presented an object or possession for the rest of the YouTube community to experience (e.g., footage of a dog playing with a ball) (ibid., p.4).

I will argue, however, that this category is too widely defined since it involves at least three different forms of content. Although they are not specific, we must assume that Landry and Guzdial also included the first-person presentations of the self in this category, or what I will refer to as Vlogs. The Vlog as a first-person presentation is somewhat different from a presentation of the self based on the display of skills. Displaying skills through music, dance or other abilities can be considered a traditional performance, while displaying yourself through, e.g., personal storytelling is essentially different (as I have also elaborated in *The performative way of YouTube*). I therefore argue for a distinction between what we can consider presentations of the self (Vlogs) and musical or artistic showcases (which are referred to below as Musical Performances).

Finally, in the "Performance/Exhibition" category, Landry and Guzdial include home movie "footage of a dog playing with a ball" (ibid., p. 4.), which I consider a third type of UGC. A home movie of a dog playing with a ball is a different type of content than personal or Musical Performances. This third type of UGC is much more emotional and does not have the same contextual information, but rather is analogous to traditional home movies that furthermore involve different examples of style and forms of communication compared to the two other forms of UGC. I will refer to this type of content as a "YouTube Moment" that is somewhat similar to the TVH, in terms of reflecting on funny, excessive and emotional behaviour, but is in contrast to TVH, by being made and uploaded by non-professional creators of UGC.

Landry and Guzdial's category "Experiment" somewhat also overlaps the "YouTube Moment" category with their inclusion of filming experiments. However, they do not seem to make any distinction between thematic and visual experiments. I also incorporate an "Artistic" category that does not include, e.g., mixing Mentos candies with cola, which instead would be placed in the "YouTube Moment" category. The YouTube Moment is characterised as the recording of something extraordinary or funny, and in this case the experiment is not the theme, but rather the reaction and extraordinariness of what happens when mixing Mentos are interesting. Further, I will elaborate on why people share these types of videos, as well as why I adopt the term "experiment" in regards to experimenting with aesthetic or narrative codes, as in, e.g., animations as an artistic expression, which does not include the home movie recording of mixing Mentos with cola.

I have moreover added types of UGC that remediate already existing formats, such as interviews, Fictional Shorts and "Parodies". Altogether I have defined nine categories that will be elaborated here. The identification of these is examined in the article *Categorising YouTube* as the result of a genre analysis. The genre analysis identified nine different types of UGC that by no means are exclusive. They reflect the fact that YouTube includes new forms of UGC, but as mentioned also reflections and remediations of already existing content.

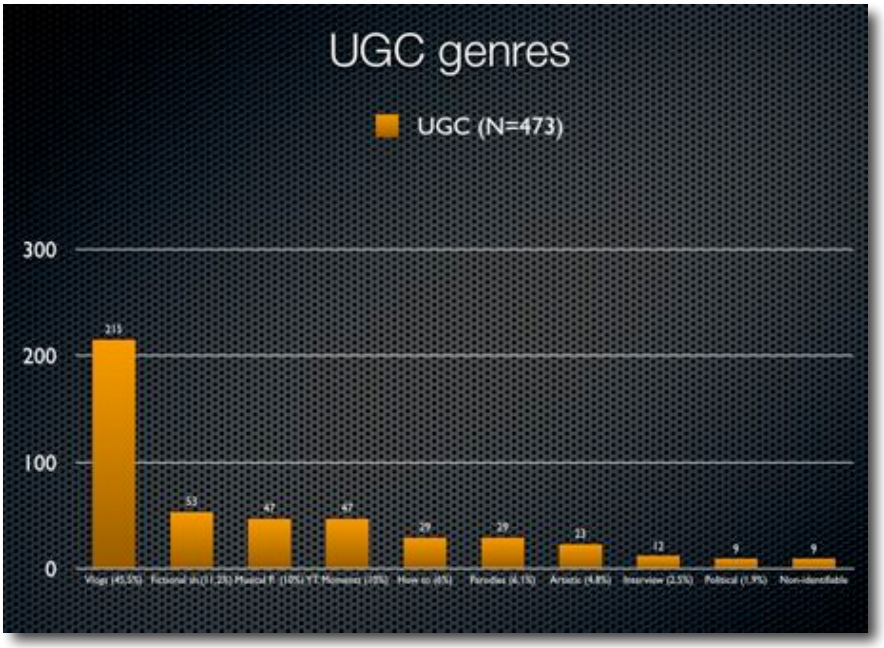


Figure 13: *Frequency of UGC genres*

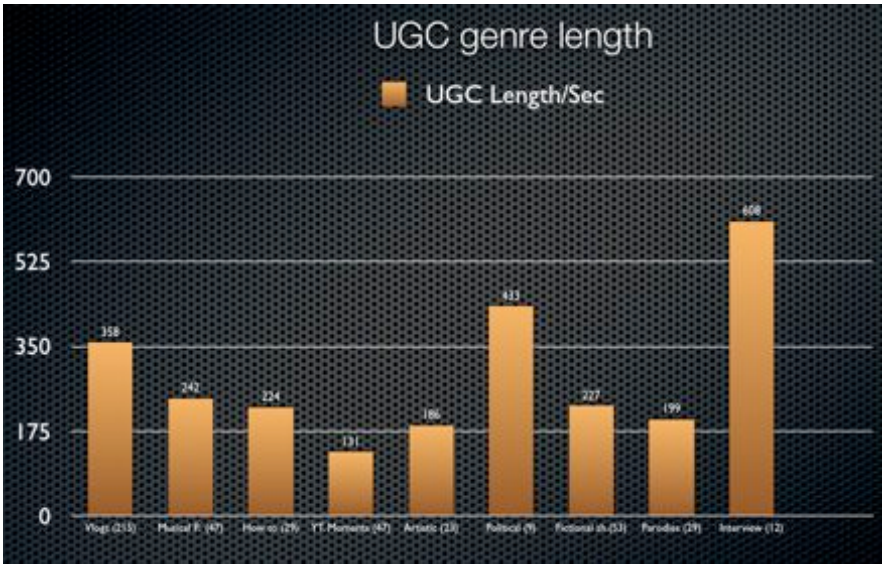


Figure 14: *Registration of length in UGC genres*

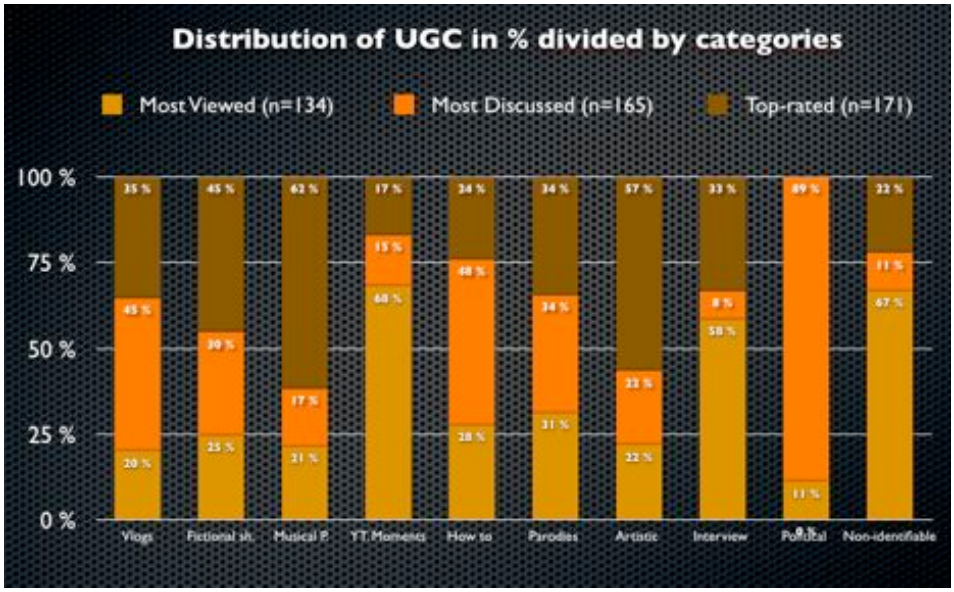


Figure 15: *UGC genres divided by browsing categories*

3.4.1 UGC genres

Each of the identified categories of UGC will be briefly characterised in the following. I also will refer to the article *Categorising YouTube*, where each category is also identified and discussed, and the following descriptions are presented in correspondence with this article.

The Vlog (n=215)

The most frequent type of UGC is the so-called Vlog, which is more extensively defined in the article *Presentations of the Self on YouTube*. In short, a Vlog is considered a first-person video that is identified by its overt focus on the personal self-presentation of the video creator. The style was earlier identified via the static web-cam attached to the computer, but more recently a dynamic style has emerged – using mobile cameras and iPhones. Burgess and Green (2009) also register the Vlog as one of the most predominant forms of UGC. Figure 13 clearly indicates the predominance of the Vlog, where it is by far the most frequent form of UGC. As Figure 15 shows, 80% of the Vlogs are found within the interactive categories (most discussed and top-rated) and it indicates a more user-interactive category compared to, e.g., YouTube Moments or Interviews. Viewers of the Vlogs often are directly addressed, i.e., by the Vlogs' first-person camera position. The Vlogs are discussed in depth in *Presentations of the Self on YouTube* and will be elaborated on in Chapter 9

Fictional Short movies & sketches (n=53)

The Fictional Short is an established genre that has been adopted on YouTube, and it involves traditional story-telling elements (e.g., credits, background music). In comparison to other forms, the creators and the crew making the film are more acknowledged as creators. Fictional Shorts also exemplify the display of artistic skills of, e.g., storytelling and visual talent. But at the same time, as also mentioned in *Categorising YouTube,* nearly half of the Fictional Shorts integrate a meta-commenting layer that in many cases includes "behind the scene" clips. There are also many examples of audience interaction, i.e., competitions or encouragement for user-commentaries, thus breaking the diegetic fictional world. Another common feature is the use of a user-narrative, where fictional characters' dilemmas are taken out of their fictional context and users are asked to make choices. The link structure in that sense also functions as a narrative flow within the content.

Musical Performance (n=47)
A common way of presenting the self through explicit artistic skills involves in most cases an act of singing or playing an instrument. The Musical Performances can be divided into three different forms: 1) first-person videos similar to the Vlog style, 2) home video recordings, as well as 3) the more well-produced music videos. All three styles reflect upon the demonstrations of skills and appear to share the same ambition of being discovered. In that sense, the Musical Performances very much reflect upon visibility, but they are less oral-dominated and direct first-person communication rarely takes place. This is also demonstrated by a high frequency of signs and texts (66%), where a lot of information (such as how to rate, subscribe, contact or buy the music) is communicated through text rather than spoken, as is the case in Vlogs. Most of the videos are presenting an individual, who is revealing skills that implicitly call for users' judgments through ratings (62% of the Musical Performances are found in the top-rated category).

YouTube Moments (n=47)
The YouTube Moment signals a rare and one-time occasion being captured by the camera. This involves home movies of dancing cats, laughing babies as well as sneezing pandas. This category resembles the television show *America's Funniest Home Videos* or the non-UGC category "Television Highlights" (TVH). It is the UGC form with the shortest format (131 seconds on average, cf. Figure 14) and compared to other forms, it seems to attract a wider audience, as 68% of the YouTube Moments are registered in the most-viewed categories (cf. Figure 15). As with TVH, they do not provide a lot of contextual information, which is indicated by the fact that the YouTube Moment is the genre with the least registered use of signs or texts. In contrast to, e.g., Vlogs or the How-to, the main way to navigate through a YouTube Moment seems to be via audio-visuality, although the voice-over function is only used in 4% of the videos. Richard Chalfen uses the term "Kodak-culture" and explains how people are able to navigate through "Kodak moments" due to their conventional form (also see Chalfen 1987, pp. 13-15), which perhaps also could be applied to YouTube Moments. Finally, the YouTube Moment is dominated by a traditional home movie style, the observational handheld-camera. This can also be explained by their coincidental status that in many cases involve family rituals in domestic settings, including leisure and everyday activities (e.g., sports spectating, restaurant visits) or holiday movies.

How to (and DIY) (n=29)
This genre is in a sense an already existing genre if compared to television programmes such as *TV-shopping* or *TV-shop*. It has the same structure, i.e., of a person presenting a specific product. The difference is that the YouTube "How to" is not selling any concrete products, but provides a didactical learning dimension, or users can win something by involving themselves, i.e., subscribing or commenting. Another difference is the domestic setting, which is underlined by the Do-it-Yourself (DIY) characteristic that many of these videos include. Most videos are shot at home and involve a personal approach far from the television-studio setup. The main focus in this category is primarily on the object being presented rather than on the presenting self. They are therefore also dominated by a rhetorical persuasive didactic tone (93% of the How-to videos used the didactic form), where the DIY aspect also strengthens the users' identification with the presenter. At the same time, 72% of the videos involved a meta-commenting layer. In most cases the meta-comments add information on how to navigate through the site and how to interact. The meta-comments also include the "behind the scene" clip similar to many of the other UGC genres, communicating authenticity. Finally there are also several so-called "unboxing videos" in this category, where the creator unpacks an item in front of the camera, while commenting and showing all details of this ritual. This can also be regarded as an act of sociability

in which the creator wants to share his or her experience of having purchased a new product with other users that comment or video respond with their products.

Parodies (n=29)
"Parodies" is a well-known genre that also involves several sub- or co-genres (e.g., imitation, pastiche, travesty, satire) that have been analysed in detail by, e.g., Gerard Genette (1997). I will not go into detail regarding Genette's distinction, but I have included all forms in this category. Similar to the YouTube Moment, the average length of the parody video is short (199 seconds), which can be explained by the inherent dependence on intertextuality that presupposes that viewers are familiar with the already existing content that the parody is based on, which obviates contextual information. Parodies is thus the UGC genre with the highest proportion of intertextuality (93%). Some of the Parodies are spoofs or imitations of music videos (30%), while others involve Parodies of other YouTube celebrities or famous actors representing mainstream popular culture. Especially musical spoofs have been at the centre of discussion in terms of copyright infringements. This can perhaps also explain the rather low occurrence of Parodies in the sample, since many are removed when violating copyright laws. As Lawrence Lessig has argued, with the emergence of digital media and technology, reproduction and re-working content has never been easier (cf. Lessig 2004, p. 45), and without copyright infringements, we would most likely see many more examples of parody. The Parodies are furthermore dominated by a quite small group of producers who have specialised in making Parodies (79% of the Parodies are part of a series). Finally, another explanation for the somewhat small proportion of this type of UGC is that some Parodies might have been characterised as Mashups since they re-combine different forms of already existing content.

Artistic and Lyrical (n=23)
This category has an aesthetic focus that emphasises how creators express themselves through audiovisuality. As argued in *Categorising YouTube*, this genre is dominated by a poetic form of communication and has the highest use of animations (56%) and SFX (35%) as well as a high proportion of background music (74%). Like the Musical Performances, most Artistic and Lyrical videos are found in the top-rated categories (56%). But with a proportion of only 4.8% of the sample, Artistic and Lyrical videos are far from visible in the overall sample, and it supports a tendency that Jean and Burgess also characterised as an emergence of a "Vernacular Creativity" (cf. 2009, p. 26), which favours communicative skills, somewhat different from traditional forms of creativity that are associated with aesthetic expression (cf. *The Mashups of YouTube*). This category must also be regarded in the context of this sample. As Bill Nichols has argued in regards to poetic and lyrical documentaries as belonging to an avant-garde tradition (2001, p. 102), the Artistic and Lyrical videos are a more marginalised type of content with noticeably fewer views and comments than other forms of UGC. In a sample of popular content of YouTube, it was therefore not expected that artistically based and experimental videos would dominate.

Interview and reportage (n=12)
This small category is similar to the traditional news form, with a focus on the communicative interactive situation. Like in the Vlog, the creator appears in front of the camera; but rather than being a presentation of the self, the interview and reportage genre has its interest in the object being interviewed or depicted in the reportage. There are relatively few examples of this form of UGC in the sample, perhaps since these are less "entertaining". Compared to the Vlogs, they pose a more serious approach towards the communicative situation, although there are also examples of subjective and performative modes. Being a conventional form, it has a high proportion of, e.g., signs and texts (58%), as we also see in television interviews or reportages, but it simultaneously includes a meta-commenting layer in 58% of the observed videos in this category. Many of these function as "behind the scene"

videos that, e.g., combine interviews with other footage, thus becoming reflections on content. Finally, with an average length of 608 seconds, this category somewhat surprisingly contains the videos with the longest running time. In most cases the interviews appear unedited, as in two videos where ordinary YouTubers are interviewing a celebrity in a full-length interview, which normally would have been reduced significantly.

Political (n=9)
As a consequence of this sample being taken from the most popular content, political issues or critical videos of YouTube also define the smallest category in this sample. Eight out of nine videos were found in the most discussed categories reflecting on this category's status as one that raises issues users tend to involve through commenting. In several cases, the video is a discussion on religion. Like the interview and reportage category, this category involves little entertainment, which explains its marginal proportion of this sample. It is the category with the highest proportion of voiceover (55.5%) and traditional use of signs (78%) underlying its didactic and rhetorical emphasis, since the videos in this category explicitly present an argument of which they are trying to convince their audiences, where 8 out of 9 videos likewise have been registered as integrating the didactic form of communication.

Non-identifiable (n=9)
This category involves the remaining videos, which could not be placed in any suitable category.

3.5 The documentary legacy

In the initial observation of 900 videos in 2009, a majority of the content could be characterised as non-fiction or as a mix between fiction and non-fiction content. This aspect was therefore included in the coding scheme and in the analysis of the 900 videos coded in 2010. Each video identified as UGC was categorised as either a video of "fiction", "non-fiction" or a "mix of fiction and non-fiction". This is a fundamental typological distinction that is somewhat complicated. The coding process for such a distinction, I argue, is nonetheless possible. This has been argued, for example, in a pragmatic cognitive approach towards non-fiction (e.g., Edward Branigan 1992, and Carl Plantinga 1997). Plantinga advocates for a cognitive pragmatic distinction between fiction and non-fiction that does not provide us with answers about whether a text is true or not. In his distinction between fiction and non-fiction, Plantinga adopts Nichols Wolterstorff's theory on speech acts and uses two distinctive positions: *fictive stance* and *assertive stance*:

> To take up the fictive stance toward some state of affairs is not to assert that the state of affairs is true (...) In the nonfiction film, on the other hand, the typical stance taken is *assertive;* the states of affairs represented are asserted to occur in the actual world as portrayed (1997, p.17).

According to Plantinga, there is a fundamental difference between non-fictional text's relationship towards the historical world, whereas fiction refers to a fictional world that has no obligation towards reality. Plantinga argues that there is no point in distinguishing between imitation and manipulation, but rather in the specific position, which the text applies towards its audience:

> The distinction between fiction and nonfiction should not be based on a presumed correspondence to reality (nonfiction) versus mediated representation (fiction), but according to the stance taken toward the projected world of the text (ibid., p 33).

A distinction between fiction and non-fiction cannot be based on rhetoric or specific codes, but rather on the position or "stance" which we place the texts in relationship to our everyday experience in reality. This is also Edward Braningan's argument in *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (1992), where he

advocates that the distinction between fiction and non-fiction must be found in the method or procedure that involves a fundamentally different cognitive reading:

> (…) the *method or procedure* for making decisions about assigning reference is different in each case even if the results are the same (i.e., knowledge about some condition in the world (Branigan, p. 193).

This of course makes all attempts of registering UGC as either fiction or non-fiction following a traditional content analysis somewhat impossible. Thus, as Krippendorff has argued, we must involve our analytical and interpretative stance as a researcher (cf. *2.3*). This is clearly an individual choice, but nonetheless, following Plantinga and Branigan, a decision on whether a specific text is either fiction or non-fiction relies on the specific position that is also based on our experiences with everyday life and thus somewhat collective. And as will be illustrated in the intercoder reliability test, there is statistically high agreement between the coders on this matter, which indicates that three independent registrations of the relationship between fiction and non-fiction are statistically homogenous (cf. chapter 4).

According to Branigan, there are different procedures and circumstances that connect our reading and perception of a text with the outside world. Fiction entails the same understanding, but we do not believe that the world presented is real in the same way as we believe in the world in a non-fiction text. This distinction between understanding and believing accordingly, for Branigan (ibid., p. 192), is fundamental for distinguishing between these two forms of generic texts. Fiction is related to the historical world, but is *indeterminate*, while non-fiction is related to reality with a *determinate* reference:

> A 'fiction' is neither simply false nor obviously true but initially is merely indeterminate and nonspecific (...) Fictional reference is judged on a case by case basis and is ultimately decided through the filter of a perceiver's already existing structure of knowledge (...) By contrast, in nonfiction no initial redescription is necessary since we assume as a starting point for our interpretation that the reference is determinate, particular, and unique (1992, p. 196).

The differentiation lies thus in the starting point or position that we address the text with and which relies on our experience with the world that equips us with a pre-defined understanding of how to navigate through texts of fiction and non-fiction.

The differentiation between fiction and non-fiction, in regards to traditional documentary, according to Plantinga, furthermore, is dependent upon genre expectations and cultural institutions. We must, however, object that there are not yet such conventions on YouTube, and that institutions do not have the same regulative nor authoritative role. Additionally, I argue the impression of whether a video on YouTube is considered as non-fiction moreover has very much to do with the meta-data surrounding the video as well as the use of self-reflexivity that draws attention towards the historical reality.

Rather than conventional codes, the following distinction between texts of fiction and non-fiction is based on the impression of either a fictional world or reality, which the video communicates towards its audience. There are, however, many examples of videos that equally provide two simultaneous depictions of the same person, one that is fictional and one that is non-fiction, for example when a video presents a rehearsed and staged scene followed by a second part explaining and reflecting on the same scene. These videos have been coded as a "mix between fiction and non-fiction".

The intention of incorporating Plantinga and Branigan's cognitive approach is not to apply this as a theoretical frame to the project or to provide an easy solution to a very complex task: i.e., arguing for an all-embracing distinction between fiction and non-fiction. Instead, the aim is just as much to demonstrate that a distinction between different texts is not entirely based on conventional codes, but

just as much on experiences of everyday life and audience's impressions of the text. Here we can understand non-fiction texts to be representations of historical reality and the result of a mental process that is not defined as indexical reproductions, but as biased versions of reality, suggesting a representation of reality fundamentally understood as an impression of reality overtly different from fictional texts.

The sample demonstrated a clear predominance of non-fiction content as illustrated in the figure below:

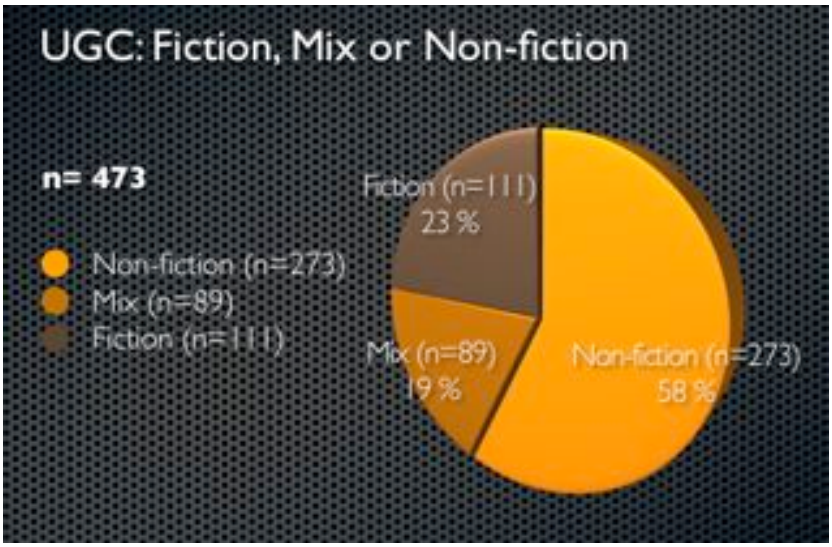


Figure 16: *Proportion of nonfiction/fiction*

The chart indicates a predominance of non-fiction content, which supports the previous argument that authenticity appears to be a central characteristic in much of UGC, which at the same time are mediated and somewhat staged versions of the creators or their surroundings. But by reflecting upon this role as creators, they also reinforce their status as sincere creators that ultimately communicate a transparent and authentic version of themselves.

The proportion of "mix between fiction and non-fiction" is rather high, and it indicates that much of the content on YouTube entails a fictional layer, but at the same time involve a self-reflexive layer and a distance towards the fictional scene that thereby connects the video to the historical reality.

Twenty-three percent of the videos are coded as fiction and in that sense not absent in this sample; but compared to non-fiction, videos of fiction are significantly less frequent. Another explanation for this is perhaps also that creating fiction in a traditional sense involves script writing and an understanding of narratives as well as acting, which for many creators of UGC without any training in film production is more demanding.

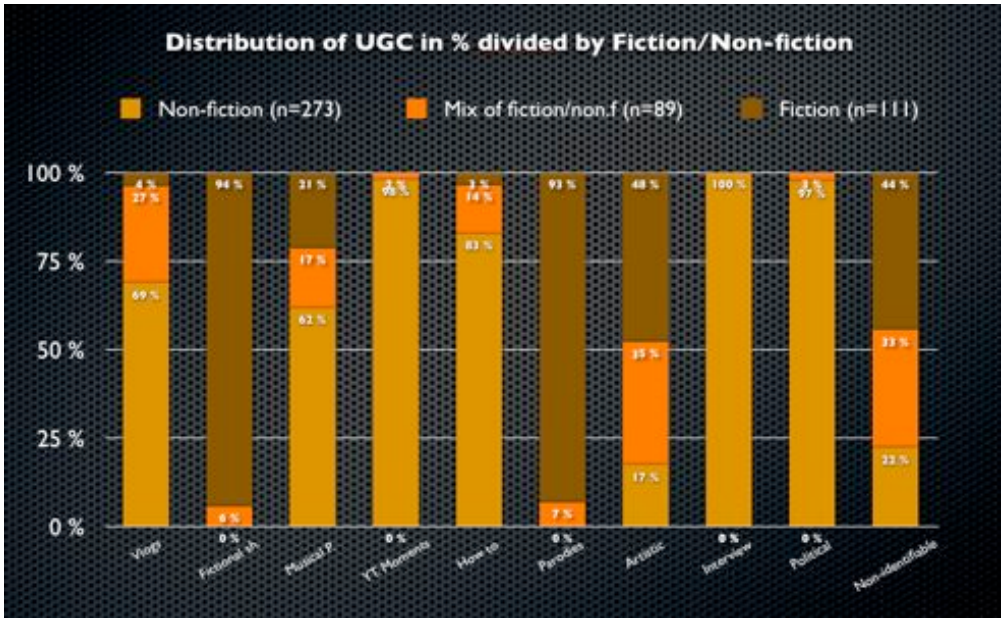


Figure 17: *Proportion of Fiction/Non-fiction in UGC genres*

In regards to the different forms of UGC, traditional genres such as a Fictional Shorts and Parodies as well as Artistic and Lyrical videos are dominated by fiction. Together with the Fictional Shorts, Parodies in almost all examples have been identified as fictional (93%), which can be explained by the easily identifiable fictional role most users take when they imitate something already fictional (e.g., narrative music videos, famous movie characters or cartoon characters).

YouTube Moments, Musical Performances, Interviews/Reportage and Political UGC have been coded primarily as non-fiction. The Vlog genre has also been coded as predominantly non-fiction (69%), with 27% of the Vlogs coded as a mix between fiction and non-fiction, while only 3% were coded as fiction. As argued above, the presentation of the self in most cases is related to an impression of authenticity, which is clearly reflected in the Vlogs. At the same time, however, its very subjective mode of presenting the self locates the Vlogs in a two-fold position, where on the one hand creators need to present a sincere version of themselves, but on the other hand this version needs to be entertaining in order to attract an audience (see *The Performative Way of YouTube*; I will also return to this aspect in the analysis). Figure 17 presents the differences across UGC forms that, following this distinction, communicate in fundamentally different ways, which will also be underlined in the investigation of forms of communication in the next section.

Overall, the sample perhaps also reflects what other researchers have argued in regards to reality television, as a "reality movement" (e.g., Dovey 2000, Jerslev et al. 2002, Kilborn 2003). They argue that the mediation of everyday life has become an extension of everyday life (also see Bondebjerg 2002 and Corner 2002), where mediations of the self have become a common thing when communicating with other people. James Gilmore and Joseph Pine have examined how authenticity influences modern business strategies, and as they initially state: "People increasingly see the world in terms of real and fake, and want to buy something real from someone genuine, not a fake from some phony" (2007, p. 1). We could similarly state that consumers of YouTube do not want fake or insincere versions of the self, they want authentic versions of the self that leave us with the impression of the real or an impression of an authentic performance (cf. *8.10*).

3.6 Forms of communication

Based on the initial observation of content in 2009, it was expected that a large amount of content could be considered non-fiction or a mix of fiction and non-fiction. Hence components of different modes of communicating non-fiction were also integrated into the coding scheme, where it was observed whether the videos were using a specific mode of communication. These modes are based on the different forms of documentary representations presented by Bill Nichols (1991, 1994 and 2001).

These modes of representation have frequently been criticised in terms of Nichols' emphasis on them as historically specific and hierarchical (cf. Plantinga 1997, Bondebjerg 2008). Despite the critique of these modes, they are used to characterise the sample here, since they provide fundamental forms of representation that most researchers nonetheless tend to agree on or at least reflect upon when presenting different modes of documentary representation. As also acknowledged by Nichols, documentaries are normally not dominated solely by one mode of representation, but potentially by the presence of several simultaneous forms (1991, p. 33).

For that reason, the coding of UGC as specific forms of communications were not exclusively limited to one principal form of communication, but on the contrary, each video can easily contain more than one mode since it is often very difficult to identity the predominant form. It would be misleading to state that a video is exclusively performative or exclusively didactic. The coded UGC therefore will be considered as examples of multiple communicative forms that are not limited to a specific mode of communication, but in most examples appear as a mix of different types. For the same reason, each video has not been identified with only one mode of communication, but is registered with several.

The findings regarding forms of communication are therefore solely indications of the different forms of representation modes that occur in the video. By a registration of each form for each genre, it can nonetheless be demonstrated that the appearance of some modes of representation are more dominant than others in the specific video. But it also means that registrations are not exclusive descriptions of the videos, but occurrences that can provide a perhaps descriptive picture of how different modes of documentary representation can frequently be recognised.

The didactic and expository form

With 80 registered occurrences, this form is a frequent mode of communication within non-fiction UGC. The didactic and expository involves the traditional "Voice of God" used in documentaries that first and foremost serves an illustrating purpose and is intended to rhetorically persuade their audiences of a specific argument. The most obvious examples are the programmes from Animal Planet and Discovery Channel, where pictures serve as illustrations of the narrating voice. The didactic form is present on YouTube, i.e., voiceover, and through people who talk directly towards the camera in order to persuade the audience of an argument or a specific issue. This type of rhetoric argumentation has primarily been identified in the videos that serve to illustrate and instruct users how to do certain things as in the "How to" genre, where 93% of the videos were identified using a didactic form. As mentioned regarding the Political category, the didactic form is overtly present in their presentation of a rhetorical argument. Finally, the didactic form can also be found in a thematic subgenre of the Vlog (17%), the so-called make-up Vlogs, where in particular young women present make-up products.

The observational form

The observational form has its origin in the documentary style of "Direct Cinema", also called the "Fly-on-the-wall" technique (cf. Nichols 1991, p. 38). It is characterised by its observing form with no intervention from the director or creator, such as in the films of Frederick Wiseman, Richard Leacock or D. A. Pennebaker. This observational form is also analogous with the home movie style (cf. Chalfen

1987), where the camera takes on an observational role of family situations (holidays, birthdays) and other ritual behaviours. The home movie is frequently accompanied by a voiceover from the creator of the home movie. On YouTube, the most noticeable examples of the observational form are the "YouTube Moments", where most of the 67 occurrences of the observational style can be found. These are home movie recordings of everyday life without intervention from the creator. Some of the most popular are spontaneous everyday depictions of laughing babies and funny pets. The observational form is often presented in long takes with no editing, but we also see a tendency towards the use of observational style in the Vlogs that, however, are overshadowed by the more subjective mode associated with the performative, as argued below.

The interactive form

This form is rather difficult to determine since it has some resemblance with the performative (see below) and is often wrongly associated with "Direct Cinema". As Nichols argues, it is more appropriate to make a distinction between Direct Cinema and the French-Canadian parallel "Cinema Verite" ("Film truth") that also takes on an observational role, but is simultaneously combined with the presence of the director, as Nichols states: "The mode introduces a sense of partialness, of situated presence and local knowledge that derives from the actual encounter of filmmaker and other" (ibid., p. 44). He or she interacts with the interviewee and thereby adds interactive reflections to the communicative situation. One of the classic examples of this form is Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'un été* (1961). In regards to YouTube, the interactive form was evident in 56 videos, and especially in the recordings of face-to-face situations that in their most explicit version are dialogues or classic interviews, as in the Interview and Reportage genre (75%) or more rarely in the Vlogs (17%). Following Nichols' understanding of the interactive form as fundamentally tied to an intentional "discourse of sobriety" (ibid., p. 50), it predominantly functions as an intended objective form of communication, which is moreover tied to a cultural institutional tradition. As will be elaborated later, YouTube is characterised by a much more decentralised institutional organisation and no traditional contextual expectation exists that the content strives towards any objective rhetorical voice. YouTube on the contrary is characterised by more subjective modes of communication that are closer to the performative mode.

The reflexive form

Before discussing the performative mode, I will briefly address the reflexive mode, which involves documentary meta-films, i.e., a process of production, and thereby reflecting upon their own construction of reality. Nichols is often accused of favouring this form because, according to him, it provides the most true version of documentary representation, since it follows the theories of Bertolt Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekt" or Viktor Shklovsky's "Defamiliarization", which similarly emphasise the ability to create a distance between the text and the audience. As Nichols states: "It is itself the least naive and the most doubtful about the possibilities of communication and expression than the other modes take for granted" (Nichols 1991, p. 60).

In this context, this form is only used to register meta-film that explicitly reflects on YouTube and its own construction throughout the entire video and not if for instance the creators momentarily reflect upon their roles as creators or show a scene where the video is being edited, since this is also being registered in the observation of keywords (see next paragraph) as a meta-communication and self-reflexivity. There are relatively few videos integrating the reflexive form as a mode of communication. The highest proportion is evident in the "How-To" genre, where 24% of the videos have been identified as using the reflexive form.

The performative form

The most dominant form of communication is the performative, with 232 occurrences registered. This can be explained by the predominance of first-person videos that in most cases involve a specific subjective mode of self-presentation (cf. *The performative way of YouTube*). In Nichols' terms, the performative is a subjective mode – meaning that in contrast to the previous forms, the representational emphasis is somewhat dominated by presentation, where the representation of reality is told and communicated through a creator's voice in a much more explicit form than the previous modes. But it also entails the adaptation of a certain role, either in terms of the social actors or the creator. Bill Nichols defines the performative documentary in *Blurred Boundaries*:

> Performative documentary clearly embodies a paradox: it generates a distinct tension between performance and document, between the personal and the typical (…) One draws attention to itself, the other to what it represents (1994, p. 97).

The performative documentary changes focus from an objective and referential representation of reality towards a more subjective presentation of the self, and in terms of the creator or the social actor in the film. On YouTube, the performative mode is most obvious in the videos where the creator puts her or himself in focus, which also involves adopting an explicit role as a creator in front of an audience (cf. *The performative way of YouTube*). In terms of coding, the performative mode is registered if the creator gave a subjective and rather staged impression of how he or she presents him or herself (but not necessarily excluding sincerity). There is therefore a difference between the interactive and performative. This can be determined by the performative mode's inherent focus on the subjective self-presentation, while the interactive form tends to have its focus on the communicative situation that more implicitly evokes the presentation of the self.

The poetic form

The poetic form is the least evident in this sample, with only 37 registrations. Nichols presents the poetic form in his book *Introduction to Documentary*, in which he associates it with the modernist avant-garde (cf. 2001, p. 102). In this mode, the focus is on visual expressions rather than communicative strategies: "this mode stresses mood, tone and affect much more than displays of knowledge or acts of persuasion" (ibid., p. 103). Applying Nichols' definition of the poetic form, it is mainly found in the traditional creative categories of UGC, such as the Artistic and Lyrical UGC, where 74% of the videos were identified using the poetic form. In contrast, it is absent in Vlogs, YouTube Moments, Fictional Shorts, Parodies and Interviews.

The dramatised form

Nichols describes the dramatic form as "Hollywood fiction" (2001, p. 138) and does not elaborate much on this form. I will instead use the term "dramatised form" as also used by Ib Bondebjerg, who describes it as "fictional realism" (2002, p. 169). Bondebjerg also includes modes of Docudrama characterising much of reality TV, while I place both fictional and a mix between fiction and non-fiction in this mode. I have therefore not identified more specific terms for distinguishing between the content which is a mix between fiction and non-fiction, such as "drama-doc", "doc-drama" or "mockumentary", since these terms have connotations of a certain type of content, which most of the videos analysed here cannot be measured against. The registrations of videos using the dramatised form therefore, first and foremost, correspond with the number of videos that can be characterised as fiction or Parodies, where the registrations reflect videos that have also been coded as either fiction or a mix between fiction and non-fiction.

3.6.1 Summing up

The above-mentioned forms are not specific to any UGC genres, but are basic forms of representations that admittedly have certain typological connotations of classic rhetorical modes (e.g., the didactic or observational form). However, in this context they are not considered specific genres, but rather components of different forms of UGC. The identification of the forms were included in the sample in order to provide a broader perspective of how the different forms of UGC communicate to the audience and thereby provide an overview, using the sample, of how UGC involves different modes of non-fiction. These forms moreover help us identify and understand how, e.g., Vlogs predominantly communicate with their audiences and how, in terms of communication, this mode is different in comparison to, e.g., "YouTube Moments". Therefore, this is also why we must make a distinction between Vlogs and YouTube Moments or a distinction between most Vlogs and How-to videos, since these forms seem to communicate in fundamentally different ways.

They furthermore provide us with an overview of the balance between traditional rhetorical examples of non-fiction and the more distanced and subjective modes, where there is a clear predominance of the latter. John Corner uses the term "Post-documentary", when he refers to a similar shift towards more diverse documentaries. One of the basic characteristics is a "performative, playful element evident in (…) such features as the degree of self-consciousness" (2002, p. 150), which he argues has challenged the conventional rhetorics of "documentary seriousness" (ibid.). Corner exemplifies this with reference to reality TV, but it can also be recognised as an aspect reflected in many of the forms of UGC that seem to have distanced themselves from the context of "documentary seriousness", which of course is also affected by the demographic differences between traditional documentary audiences and the teenagers who predominantly consume UGC.

Overall, and despite that these registrations are occurrences rather than fundamental characteristics of the videos, the large predominance of the performative mode cannot be neglected. Further, the preponderance of the performative suggests a movement towards the more subjective and playful performative mode, supporting what has also been argued by John Corner in regards to a sociocultural shift in modes of contemporary documentary (ibid., p. 153), which, however, on YouTube has found a unique performative mode of communication.

3.7 Keywords

The last coding elements were the keywords that were added as descriptions of different features of the coded UGC.

In regards to qualitative content analysis, as advocated by Jim Macnamara (2006), there are two overall strands: "narratology" and "semiotics" (p. 15). Aspects of these will also be applied to the subsequent list of keywords (e.g., storytelling components and specific aesthetic registrations), but given the context and YouTube as a specific media platform, I shall also add two pragmatic strands in terms of user-interaction and functionality or affordance-based keywords. Since I am interested in social behaviour and aspects of self-presentations, I will be rather selective in terms of narratology and semiotics[9], which will be incorporated under the rather broad term "aesthetics". Moreover, I will add a fourth strand in terms of thematic registrations, which involves a focus on settings and environment.

[9] The use of "semiotics" literally includes the registrations of signs and systems within the text, coined by Saussure and Pierce, which is relevant to, e.g., video comments on YouTube, but in terms of audiovisuality, the semiotic approach is more relevant in terms of film semiotics, where the focus is on the specific components and codes of cinematography (e.g., Bellour 1969) or Metz's application of Saussure's theory of "Film Language" (1994). With the large amount of content, even in the case studies, a detailed film semiotic investigation as performed by, e.g., Bellour is not possible, and I will therefore not apply the term here.

The keywords are thus divided into four sub-categories based on themes, aesthetics, medium specific user-interactivity and the functionality of affordances.

- **Thematic registrations** – e.g., *family*, *domestic* and *holiday* themes.
- **Aesthetic registrations** – e.g., *credits, first-person camera, voiceover, transformed look/voice* and *background music.*
- **User-interactive registrations** – e.g., *meta-commenting, intertextuality, competitions* and *explicit user-interaction.*
- **Affordance-based registrations**[10] – e.g., *annotations, commercials* and *screen-tags.*

Thematic registrations

The thematic registrations are included in order to identify patterns of social behaviour within the content. In regards to traditional content analysis, registrations of thematic issues include an interpretative aspect, for instance, in determining where the video was recorded or which topics and activities are usually filmed. In order to identify what can be considered thematic registrations, I draw on Richard Chalfen's similar investigation of home movies and family photographs, where he argues "only a narrow spectrum of everyday life is selected for recording on film" (1987, p. 61). This includes vacation activities, seasonal holiday activities (e.g., Christmas) special events (such as weddings, baptisms) and local activities (ibid., p. 62). In comparison to these registrations, I will attempt to register similar activities in UGC. These registrations demand a different focus than the following more medium specific or user-interactive approaches and therefore were not included in the inter-coder reliability test.

Aesthetic registrations

These registrations focus on the videos' resemblance with standard narrative and audiovisual style. This involves registrations of credits, voiceover and audiovisual transformations of the creators, animations, special effects (SFX) as well as background music. The intention with these registrations is to identify which traditional aesthetics are used in the process of self-presentation. Similar to Landry and Guzdial's (2008) investigation of storytelling elements in YouTube content, the assumption is that the standard use of, e.g., credits and the involvement of background music and SFX are less frequent and have been replaced by a more YouTube specific style that is centred on social practices rather than aesthetic practices.

User-interactive registrations

This aspect focuses on the level of explicit communication towards the viewer in terms of encouragement to respond and engage in the videos (also through subscribing and rating). User-interaction involves different elements including implicit communicative features of self-reflexivity and intertextuality, as well as explicit user-interaction through direct involvement of the users via competitions or other user-activity. The intention is to determine the prevalence of user-interaction and whether this keyword category is more dominant in certain types of UGC. Another aspect is the registration of self-reflexivity and intertextuality, which seem to have several functions. The intention is also to determine how widespread these are within the sample in order to determine if self-reflexivity/meta-commenting and intertextuality are an integrated part of self-presentation on the YouTube website and how this influences the content.

[10] The registrations of affordances are limited to the video itself, meaning that paratextual layers such as comments, links and ratings were not observed by the coders.

Affordance-based registrations
This type of registration is similar to the user-interactive registrations, but refers more particularly in regards to the specific technological tools that YouTube provides for its users (cf. *6.9*) But briefly, these include numerous individual factors dependent on usage, herein the so-called "annotations" (editorial communicative effects developed by YouTube), tags and video responses. By involving these registrations, it can be investigated how the affordances influence the form and navigation processes of consuming content.

Keywords:

- **First-person camera (247 occurrences)**
  The use of "first-person camera" describes the position of the video creator when he or she is speaking or interacting directly towards the viewers. The use of first-person camera has been adopted from the video diary format and provides the videos with a sense of intimacy (see Bill Nichols 1991, Dovey 2000). Admittedly this registration provided no profound surprise, as it has in other contexts (cf. *The presentation of self on YouTube*) already been identified as one of the main characteristics of the Vlog. This is also demonstrated by the fact that 75% of the first-person camera registrations in the sample were found in the Vlog genre, where 88% of the Vlogs were registered as using a first-person camera position (the remaining Vlogs use the home movie style). The first-person camera was also the dominant style in the Musical Performances, where 44% of these videos included this style.

- **Home Movies (98 occurrences)**
  This mode is understood as the classic behind the camera style known from traditional home movies (holidays, family occasions) or reportages. The registration of the home movie style was added in order to investigate if creators were using a home movie style on YouTube. Home movie is here associated with the observational style that is not identical with the more widespread first-person camera. Home movie style can easily appear in, e.g., Vlogs, since many Vloggers turn their cameras away from themselves, filming the surroundings. Most examples of the home movie mode can be found in the YouTube Moments.

- **Voiceover (58 occurrences)**
  The voiceover is a well-known sound technique that functions as a non-diegetic narrative voice which is used to explain in this case what is going on in the video. It is also considered a tool of traditional didactic documentary (cf. Nichols 1991, p. 35). The registration serves the purpose of detecting whether or not the videos are dominated by an oral or visual narrative style. Rather surprisingly, only 12% of the registered UGC had adopted a voiceover, which is peculiar since it is quite easy to apply the voiceover as a replacement for visual illustrations in order to orientate an audience. The overall lack of voiceovers perhaps then indicates a lack of interest in post-production and editing. The voiceover is most frequent in videos with a rhetorical or didactic bias, such as the "How to" videos (45%) and the Political and Informative genre (56%), while only 5.6% of the Vlogs were registered using a voiceover.

- **Intertextuality (280 occurrences)**
  Intertextuality is a complex term and it thus is not possible to involve all its aspects here. The registration of intertextuality in this sample is thus based on a straightforward understanding of the term, e.g., proposed by Gerard Genette as a:

> (…) relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts (…) typically as the actual presence of one text within another (…) it is the traditional practice of *quoting* (1997, p. 1) [Italics in original].

As many YouTubers emerged from the same community, different YouTubers are frequently being referred to as well as appearing in each other's videos. This has also been registered as intertextual reference.

Intertextuality is a very widespread phenomenon within UGC. It is a particularly predominant oral-communicative form, such as in Vlogs and fictional genres, including, e.g., Fictional Shorts and Parodies. The widespread use of intertextuality can perhaps also be explained by the fact that a great deal of content reflects upon contemporary mainstream popular culture as well as a YouTube community (cf. *8.1.*) and its celebrities, where a lot of sense-making takes places around a shared cultural context. As will be elaborated on, much of the content can be considered remediations (that is the involvement of already existing content from other media) (cf. Bolter and Grusin 1999), and the high proportion of intertextuality perhaps also indicates this. And as argued in *Categorising YouTube*, the Internet emphasises the use of intertextuality in terms of medium specifics such as hyperlinking and more specific YouTube affordances (cf. Askehave and Nielsen 2004, and Miller and Shepherd 2009).

- **Self-reflexivity/Meta-communication (278 occurrences)**
  Like intertextuality, self-reflexivity and meta-communication are terms that cannot be fully elaborated here. Meta-communication is most commonly related to Gregory Bateson's principal definition of a communication between two agents or as a specific function of the message's code, in Roman Jakobson's famous communication model (cf. Jakobson 1960). Here meta-communication can be juxtaposed to self-reflexivity, that is, in this specific terminology and not necessarily understood in a sociological context, but simply as the act of a subject calling attention to the presentation of the self. I will in the following primarily use the term self-reflexivity in order to describe this. These elements occur concretely on YouTube, when a text communicates about itself or a presenter communicates about her or himself. This includes many elements, such as thematic reflections of filming and an aesthetic bias that turns the audience towards the process of production. Many creators orally reflect upon their status as creators, or through interacting with other people, explaining their way of behaving by referring to the action of filming. Self-reflexivity also involve signs, tags and text layers that draw attention to the process of creating and producing content. The most common way of involving this is through showing the process of editing the video. The use of meta-commenting elements is most present in the Vlog, where self-reflexivity was registered in 82% of the Vlogs. This a very high proportion that indicates the use of reflexivity is an inherent characteristic of the Vlog and, as proposed elsewhere, it can be argued that self-reflexive elements contribute as modes of establishing transparency and authenticity (cf. *3.5*). Finally, self-reflexivity is simultaneously being registered in terms of its status as a screen tag or an annotation (see below). But the two registrations measure two different communicative aspects; in this case, the specific screen tags function as self-reflexive, while in the other case, they are registered in terms of technological appearance in the video, with no focus on usage. Thus, this registration functions as an elaboration of the other registration, and I therefore see no contradictory argument to registering these aspects two times.

- **User-interaction (102 occurrences)**
  User-interaction is understood as a direct involvement of users (not through encouraging tags or signs); viewers are quoted or visualised in the videos, i.e., through integration of user-comments into the video, as illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 18: *Frame grab from the video Drugs and Rainbows*

The YouTuber *RayWilliamJohnson* always integrates user-comments in his videos as replies to a question asked in the previous video, as in Figure 18. Or this occurs when videos address issues explicitly discussed by users. Many popular YouTubers have multiple channels, and they often dedicate a specific channel for user-interaction, i.e., questions and answers (e.g. *Shane DawsonTV* or *BrittaniLouiseTaylor*). This registration was made in order to get an indication of whether the most popular YouTubers are explicitly interacting with their viewers. This registration cannot provide a sufficient picture of creators' direct involvement with users, since it does not take comment writing into account. But it is only registered in 20% of the videos (and significantly less in the registration by the coders), and I argue that direct user-involvement takes place in UGC, but is far from dominating. It is most noticeable in the Vlogs (38%), where direct user-involvement primarily takes place around thematic issues, which are suggested by users in their comments. User-interaction was also one of the three keywords that was not statistically correlated among the three coders (cf. *4.2*).

- **Screen Tags and annotations (270 occurrences)**
  Screen tags and the use of annotations (e.g., speech bubbles and pop-up links) are widespread communication tools on YouTube that combine information with potential user-activity, since they can also entail a hyperlink to a channel or to the comment section. They can be divided into two overall groups. The first group consists of encouragement of user-activity, mostly by the use of imperatives such as "subscribe, link" or "thumbs up if you like…" Direct user-interactivity takes place here through the screen tags' function as a button that for instance registers thumbs ups or subscriptions.

  In the second group, tags and annotations are used as self-reflections and ironic statements that comment on the role and behaviour of the creator. As mentioned in the description of self-reflexivity, this category overlaps in its registration of screen tags that serve a meta-communicative and self-reflexive function. However, in this registration, the purpose is to measure the occurrence of screen tags and not their function; since I do not distinguish

between different appearances of the meta-communicative elements, this concurrent coding proved necessary.

- **Signs/Texts (225 occurrences)**
  This keyword was added in order to make a distinction between traditional forms of informational codes and the annotations mentioned in the previous category. There is a fundamental difference between screen tags and signs and text, since the screen tag is a medium specific feature of YouTube, whereas texts and signs are frequently used in television and film. And while the YouTube specific screen tags create a flow through hyperlinks or an ID-trace that can be activated by clicking, the signs and texts only function as a narrative or informative feature, which is used to comment, orientate or elaborate on information. Forty-eight percent of the UGC was registered as using traditional texts and signs. It was most noticeable among Musical Performances (66%) and the Political and Informative (78%) videos, where the signs and texts function as traditional graphic layers that present the artist and the Musical Performance or as an emphasis on certain arguments, where they serve a didactic function.

- **Credits (139 occurrences)**
  The registration of credits reflects a standard acknowledgment of creation. Credits function as a traditional way of presenting the creators of the videos either in the beginning or at the end of the video. Landry and Guzdial (2008) also coded credits in order to detect the use of traditional narrative codes. Their findings show similarities to this registration, in that most videos tend to start without opening credits, throwing "their viewer directly into the action" (2008, p. 7). In this sample, credits are generally absent and are most dominant in fictional forms of UGC. As moreover illustrated in the comparison between the creator's acknowledgment on Vimeo and YouTube, it is clear that credits are most frequent in traditional forms of creative expressions such as the Fictional Shorts, where a little more than half of the videos were registered as using credits (52%). But rather surprisingly, only 30% of the Artistic and Lyrical UGC was registered as using credits. One explanation for the rather low involvement of credits in the sample is perhaps the lack of interest in the post-production phase that characterises most UGC.

- **SFX (58 occurrences)**
  SFX refers to the involvement of special effects, and it was included for similar reasons as animations (see below). Besides animations, special effects are concretely referred to here as the use of editorial effects added in post-production (but can also include, e.g., blue screen or smoke effects). It was not expected that there would be a high proportion of special effects since most video creators are evidently not concerned with editing or they seem to lack an interest. Richard Chalfen also noticed this during his study of home movie cultures; editing is an intrusion on the work process (1987, p. 55). Characteristically, SFX, like other keywords of technical specifics, was found in the fictional categories with a focus on visual expression, as in the Artistic and Lyrical category (34%) and in Parodies (34%), while only present in 7% of the Vlogs and absent in YouTube Moments and Political and Interview categories.

- **Animations (102 occurrences)**
  This keyword was added as another indicator for identifying the widespread use of editing tools and the importance of visual effects. With the emergence of digital technologies, computer animated content has become much more common in recent years, while editorial software has also integrated pre-defined animations tools. Animations like the other conventional visual effects are most present in Artistic and Lyrical UGC (56%). Another frequent use of animations is the classic stop-motion. One example is seen in Lego-animations, which is a quite large

subgenre on YouTube, where creative fans produce small narratives using stop-motion technique with Lego.

- **Transforming appearances (50 occurrences)**
  Some YouTubers choose to present themselves by applying a transformed or a disguised physical appearance. The most common form of transforming appearance is changing the voice added in the editing phase. One famous example is the comedian *Fred*, who adds a helium effect to his voice. Others, like *MysteryGuitarMan*, build online identity around the status of being mysterious, e.g., always wearing sunglasses. Transforming appearances were only registered in 10% of the content, where 68% (34) of the transforming appearances were found in the Vlogs (that is in 16% of the overall 215 Vlogs), and in most cases the transformation was created through a change of voice. One explanation for why the transforming voice is especially found in the Vlogs is perhaps the growing trend of filming with iPhones. Until recently, the only way to change physical appearance was in post-production, but along with the emergence of iPhones and other smart-phone applications, the ability to edit and play with the content on the camera has become possible. One of these is the so-called "auto-tune" function that automatically turns the voice into singing while recording (also see *The Mashups of YouTube*). This is the most common use of the transforming appearance, which is considered more a playful toy than a creative expression. The creators using an auto-tune function almost always do this from a position of personal opinion, where they take on an ironic distance towards the object they are imitating, like the Vlogger, *BrittaniLouiseTaylor*, who uses the auto-tune function in many of her videos (6 videos in this sample), but with a clear ironic distance. Transforming appearances was another of the three keywords that was not statistically corresponding among the three coders (cf. chapter 4)

- **Background music (161 occurrences)**
  The use of background music is traditionally a non-diegetic use of sound, primarily in fiction, but increasingly also in non-fiction film. In this sample, background music is first and foremost present in the traditional fictional genres such as Fictional Shorts (55%) and Parodies (62%). The highest proportion of background music can be found in the Artistic and Lyrical UGC, where 74% of the videos were registered using background music. These videos have a visual bias, where the music emphasises the narrative or an aesthetic expression serving as a dramatising effect or as providing a specific atmosphere. The least registered proportion of non-diegetic music was in the YouTube Moments (10%), while 27% of the Vlogs used non-diegetic music. Overall, background music occurred in only 25% of the videos registered as non-fiction. This suggests a rather traditional way of implementing background music in primarily fictional content.

- **Competition (50 occurrences)**
  Some videos include competitions embedded in the videos, either at the end of the video or explicitly integrated in the title as part of the video. The competition is a widespread dialogic user-interactive form. It always requests users to subscribe, comment or perform other actions that consequently contribute to a video's visibility. This also includes reflections on themes and issues based on comments that the creator integrates in the video. Thirty-six out of 50 videos registered as involving competitions were found in the Vlog category. In most cases, the competition is used as a marketing strategy, such as the videos of *CTFxC*, which always include a competition, in order for viewers to subscribe or comment, or actions that will count as promoting and thus payment. It is, however, also used to make the users accomplices, since by

participating in the competition to win the camera, they accept the conditions of the commercialised context of the Vlog.

- **Series (282 occurrences)**
  Many videos in the sample are part of a series by the same creator that has gone on for a long period of time. The series is also a reflection of an affordance on YouTube that allows viewers the possibility of linking uploaded videos to previous or subsequent videos and thereby creating a series simply by linking. This feature is also supported by the possibility of creating video responses to people's own videos, as *The Shaytards* or *CTFxC* for example do to all their videos. The link-structure enables videos to be part of an on-going series that allows the audience to navigate through the chronological order of videos. Many creators are of course creating videos that are part of the same series, not necessarily as an on-going serial, but just as much as individual videos. This includes videos of *Failblog* or *RayWilliamJohnson* that involve aesthetic and thematic consistency. The relatively high proportion of videos that are a part of a series (59%) is also related to many creators' status as YouTube Partners, where contingency of video production is a necessity. The proportion of series therefore also reflects the fact that this is a sample of the most popular content significantly dominated by YouTube Partners, as illustrated in the additional keywords below. There are, however, only a small proportion of videos in the Musical Performances (8.5%) and YouTube Moments (21%) categories that are part of a series. Both forms reflect unique occasions and specific performances where the creators are somewhat different from regular presenters, such as Vloggers (79.5%), who have integrated aspects of the on-going video diary format and thus also via the series they communicate consistency, or in Fictional Shorts (75%) and Parodies (79%), which are inspired by different sitcoms and sketch shows from television, and have also built their concepts around the series.

3.8. Reflection on the registration of keywords

Each keyword was discussed with the coders and while some made perfect sense, other keywords were more complex and were in need of specification. What also became obvious at the beginning of the coding process was that the number of keywords was overwhelming in regards to the amount of time and registrations. I therefore let the coders register the more general registrations, while I decided to initiate a second coding process in which I added a few keywords that had a more specific focus on the thematic behavioural patterns and registrations of identity that were more relevant in regards to the Vlog category.

Due to the large number of keywords, some were excluded from the final coding stage. This includes registrations of production quality, the detecting of virals and use of commercials (since it came to my attention that these are automatically integrated through the use of Google's software "AdSense" that targets the content with suitable commercials (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AdSense) and the appearance of commercials is therefore identical to all sites using AdSense). The exclusion also involves registrations of entertainment and stand-up, which were considered to be terms that were too complex to be included as keywords. Instead they are considered implicit parts of specific UGC categories.

As will be elaborated, an intercoder reliability test was performed, and it showed generally high correspondence between different coders, indicating that the data are statistically reliable. But there were also examples of disagreement in the registrations of keywords (direct user-interaction, SFX and transforming appearances). This, I argue, was primarily a result of an information overload. Besides all the other coding categories, the coders were asked to register 19 different keywords (four of these were later removed), and in retrospect, the keywords should have been coded separately in a second coding

phase. It is therefore also important to stress that the registrations of key words must be interpreted as analytical guidelines from which I draw on in order to discuss specific examples and theoretical themes.

3.9 Additional keywords

The keywords below are registrations found in the paratextual perimeters of the videos, and it was not possible for coders to register these, since they were applied to the project for a limited amount of time (these registrations are added as an additional file in the appendix). The additional registrations include: identifying YouTube partner status, and whether the videos had any video responses and identification of senders. It furthermore included recordings of thematic aspects in regards to location and the involvement of family members or holiday activities. These are all registrations that demanded second viewings, where coders needed to seek information in the paratextual layers outside the perimeters of the video, which made these codings more time demanding. These registrations are furthermore non-interpretative as they are simply "yes or no" questions, which therefore should decrease the potential for subjective readings in comparison to some of the codings integrated in the first coding process performed by three coders.

- **YouTube Partner status (400 occurrences)**
  An important aspect of understanding identities on YouTube is defining their status as creators. Arguably the purpose for creating and sharing is somewhat different for YouTube Partners than for non-partners. In this sample, a surprisingly high proportion was identified as Partners (84.5%). It also indicates that the most popular content is analogous to a principle of commodity, where we must also start questioning the relevance of referring to YouTube as a grass-roots, bottom-up site for collective, social interaction. I argue the Partner status generates a need for visibility, which is overly linked with how YouTubers present themselves within this sample, as a mode of cultural production. The registration of YouTube Partners also listed creators who could not be identified or did not have a status as a YouTube Partner[11]. Most of the non-YouTube Partners were registered in the YouTube Moments category (30%), while YouTube Partners accounted for 95% of the registered Vlogs.

- **Video Response (235 occurrences)**
  The sample also registered the frequency of videos that have added a video response. It does not account for the number of video responses or that many YouTubers use the video response as a way of linking to their own videos, such as *The Shaytards*, who integrate an automatic video-respond, which is a response to a previous video and in that sense support the linking flow. Nonetheless, half of the UGC are linked to video responses. In most cases, this involves less than 10 video responses, but some are more controversial or noticeable videos, such as the famous video *Leave Britney Alone*, which has 2,045 video responses out of 41,000,000 views and 622,000 comments (as of October 2011).

- **Family and Holiday (87 occurrences)**
  This keyword involves the registration of other family members participating in the video, which in most cases also involves holiday activity. The latter is also a reflection of the time of registration during the holiday season. Although a relatively small amount of videos involved other family members as well as holiday activity. In all, 82% of the registered appearances of

[11] The identification of YouTube Partner status can be very difficult. YouTube presents a list of some of their most popular Partners, but with more than 20,000 Partners (cf. YouTube.com), far from all of them can be found on YouTube's hierarchical list analogous to the hierarchical organisation of content. I therefore combined the available list on YouTube with a "YouTube stats" software developed by YouTube, to track the status of Partnership on YouTube (see link: http://socialblade.com/youtube/).

family members were found in the Vlog and among the 215 registered Vlogs this account for 33% of the Vlogs that thus involve other family members. The other predominant group of family registrations could be found in YouTube Moments (11%), where fun or entertaining incidents with especially children can be noted. But the rather low appearance of family members indicates that the Vlogs, although involving personal elements, are first and foremost centred around the presenting subject and less on other family members, although there are examples where family members participate in the Vlogs as well (e.g., *The Shaytards* and *CTFxC*). It was moreover noticed that none of the videos involving other family members showed any conflicts or negative aspects, which of course is also related to the fact that the creators are in control of what is being shown (also see the analysis of *The Shaytards*).

- **Domestic (239 occurrences)**
  This occurrence is registered if the video takes places in what appears to be the presenter's domestic setting that in most cases involves the living room. As with the registrations of Family and Holiday activities, the highest proportion of videos filmed in Domestic locations were found in the Vlogs, where 80% of the Vlogs were recorded in a domestic setting (while the majority of the remaining Vlogs were filmed in a home-made studio setup). A high proportion of domestic registrations were also found in the YouTube Moments, where 57% of the videos were filmed in domestic settings. The third largest proportion was found within the Musical Performances, which, however, only included 25% of this genre being recorded in a domestic setting. However, the more traditional fictional modes of UGC did not often include domestic settings (for example, 17% of the Parodies and only 4% of the Fictional Shorts). The domestic setting is therefore first and foremost a characteristic of the Vlog, where it seems to be a standard, especially within the personal form of Vlogs (cf. chapter *11*).

4. Intercoder reliability

As argued in *2.3*, many elements of the coding of the data may appear highly subjective and based on individual interpretations. I therefore involved two graduate students as coders. The two coders used the same sample I coded and they were introduced to each component in the scheme through several hours of discussions and training: e.g., overall distinctions between UGC and non-UGC, UGC genres, keywords, fiction and non-fiction. We discussed and coded the first 20 videos from the sample together. Each coder was then given screen-shots of the 900 videos collected in July and August 2010 and conducted an individual coding of the videos.

By involving two assistant coders, the subjectivity and the individual interpretations of the content analysis inspired approach were thus given a more solid fundament, statistically increasing the validity of the arguments and findings of the coding process. Based on the data I received from the two coders, I performed an intercoder-reliability test or a homogeneity test (a X^2 test) with help from the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Aalborg University. The intention with the test is to investigate the degree of homogeneity between the choices of individuals presented with a set of classifications, where the observed frequency is compared to the expected frequency. In that sense, the X^2 test is a measure of the "distance between the data and the expectations of the model", as stated by David Freedman et al. (1991, p. 477). This distance is also referred to as X^2 or "Chi-square" and can be measured by following the formula (ibid.):

$$\chi^2 = \text{sum of } \frac{(\text{observed frequency} - \text{expected frequency})^2}{\text{expected frequency}}$$

Figure 19: *Chi-Square formula*

In this project, X^2 is thus the result of observing the different components from the sample and the frequency of what statistically could be expected to be found. The next step in the test is to measure the probability of X^2 in comparison with the other coders, in this case two other coders. This probability is called the "P-Value" and is hence the statistical chance of getting the X^2 or greater (ibid., p. 478). We can identify *P* as approximately equal to X^2 in its relationship to the number of degrees of freedom (*DF*) involved. That is the squared lengths or the free components of a sample: "number of terms in $X^2 - 1$" (ibid., p. 478).

The P-value is also defined in comparison to the assumed "null hypothesis". In this case the null hypothesis is that there are no differences among the three coders. This hypothesis cannot be proven, it can only be rejected or fail to be rejected. According to many statisticians, the null hypothesis is rejected if *P* is less than 5%, which means the result is statistically significant, and the codings are then unlikely to have statistically occurred by chance alone (ibid., p. 492). If *P* is greater than 5%, we can assume that there is a statistically significant probability that the codings are identical.

The test was performed on the coded data from the two coders and myself. It was performed on each of the components in the coding scheme: overall "type" (UGC or non-UGC), "UGC genre", "fiction or non-fiction", "forms of communication" and "keywords". The distinctions between *A)* the four different types of overall content (MV, TVH, UGC and Mashups), *B)* fiction/non-fiction and *C)* UGC genres are shown in the table below:

Statistics for table of YouTube coding by coder

Statistic	Component	DF	Value	P-value	P-value %
X^2	Type	6	0,6076	0,9963	99,6
X^2	Fiction/Nonfiction	4	6,9201	0,1402	14
X^2	UGC genre	18	7,7351	0,9821	98,2

Table 1: *Results of the X^2 tests for type, Fiction/Non-fiction & UGC genres*

The X^2 test for these three components shows that the differences are considered to be *not statistically significant*, meaning that the three individual codings statistically corresponded. Hence, with P-values of 99%, 14% and 98%, there is very high statistical agreement between the three coders on these three components (see appendix files *Ap. 4.1-Ap.4.4* for more detailed data).

4.1 Test of forms of communication

Due to the possibility of selecting more than one option in both forms of communication and keywords, the conditions for performing a X^2 test for all observations of the components are not possible. A X^2 test can be made which assumes that the three coders have coded the videos with the statistically same appearances of the various forms of communication in each video. The purpose for including these was to detect the presence of some aspects and not to identify all the forms of each video.

A more accurate perspective, I argue, will therefore be to perform a X^2 test on each of the modes of communication. This approach may be statistically more complicated, but as in the case both in the use of the modes of representation by Nichols and here, these forms are juxtaposed in most of the videos, where it is not possible to comprehensively determine which form may dominate the video. Many of the videos include several layers of communications, e.g., a performative subjective mode followed by a more didactic voice or a reflexive scene where the performative form is discussed, while the video may also include a sequence of a traditional observational mode. In that sense, a video is not necessarily dominated by one mode of communication, but by several, which is why one overall description in some cases could be misleading. The possibility of adding several forms of communications was therefore integrated into the coding scheme.

Statistics for table of *Form of communication* coding by coder

Statistic	Form of com.	DF	Value	P-value	P %
X^2	Didactic	1	0,7168	0,698	70
X^2	Observational	1	1,6024	0,448	44,8
X^2	Interactive	1	16,538	0,00025	0,02
X^2	Reflexive	1	11,856	0,0027	0,27
X^2	Performative	1	2,9	0,234	23,4
X^2	Poetic	1	0,565	0,754	75,4
X^2	Dramatized	1	8,8165	0,0122	1,22

Table 2: *Statistics for Form of communication between the three coders*

The X^2 test shows that, in terms of coding, the interactive, reflexive and fictional/dramatic mode have P-values less than 5%, and there is therefore statistically significant disagreement between coder # 2 and the other coder and myself. While coder # 1 and my coding correspond, coder # 2 coded significantly fewer videos with more than one form of communication in regards to the interactive form and the reflexive, as well as the dramatised (cf. appendix). These three forms may overlap with some of the keywords and genres, which could explain the disagreement.

One issue that has not been touched upon is also whether Nichols' modes, of representations, in a retro-perspective, are perhaps too diffuse to involve in a content analysis inspired approach, as Nichols, in a later book, regards them as "fuzzy concepts" (2001, p. 21) as he states: "Documentaries adopt no fixed inventory of techniques, address no one set of issues, display no single set of forms or styles" (ibid, p. 21) that moreover change over time and as it can also be noted, it can be difficult to compare traditional forms of documentaries with UGC on YouTube, although the forms of communication support the argument that many UGC adopt performative subjective behaviour.

4.2. Test of keywords

The coders were also asked to make a registration of keywords. Initially some of these were less important than others, but nonetheless registered. As illustrated in the figure below, the inter-coder test revealed general statistical homogeneity in the coding of keywords, indicating that we regard the keyword registrations with an overall correspondence. In the registrations of user-interaction, SFX and transformed appearances, there was, however, statistical significance, where the P-values for these keywords was less than 5% and the null hypothesis was thus rejected. Concerning user-interaction, this can perhaps be explained by the somewhat difficult task of identifying user-interaction and distinguishing it from, e.g., tags or signs.

Statistics for table of *Keywords* coding by coder					
Statistic	**Keyword**	**DF**	**Value**	**P-value**	**P-value %**
X^2	1.p. Cam	1	0,75762	0,6847	68,4
X^2	Home Video	1	5,4189	0,06657	6,6
X^2	Voice Over	1	5,2079	0,074	7,4
X^2	Intertextuality	1	1,5994	0,4494	45
X^2	Meta-comm.	1	3,5622	0,1685	16,8
X^2	User-interact.	1	9,0002	0,0111	1,1
X^2	Tags	1	2,9014	0,2344	23,4
X^2	Signs/Texts	1	2,3022	0,3163	31,6
X^2	Credits	1	5,1993	0,07431	7,4
X^2	SFX	1	13,9705	0,000925	0,09
X^2	Animations	1	5,4505	0,0655	6,5
X^2	Transform App.	1	8,8765	0,0118	1,2
X^2	BG Music	1	3,934	0,1398	14
X^2	Competition	1	4,0679	0,1308	13,1
X^2	Series	1	3,4323	0,1798	18

Table 3: *Statistics for Keywords between the three coders*

4.3 Overall comment

Overall, the tests demonstrate statistical agreement, while there were small disagreements in terms of form of communication and keywords. This can perhaps also be explained by the large number of observations and data with which each coder had to code the videos. In retrospect, the large number of keywords and the specific forms of communication should have been registered in a second coding phase. But due to limitations of resources and time, the coders could not perform a more distinctively and detailed registration of the content that in terms of length would have demanded much more time than was available. This is especially true in regards to the coding of keywords, which would have benefitted from several viewings of each video. But as illustrated in most of the coding, there was generally statistical agreement that nevertheless supports that this approach is reliable.

5. Summing up

Partly drawing on previous studies of YouTube and contemporary Internet Studies, this chapter has discussed and argued for the integration of a content analysis inspired approach. It is an approach that is determined by YouTube as a dynamic platform that thereby challenges the traditional conditions of content analysis, and a more subjective and interpretative understanding of content analysis has been applied following the arguments of, e.g., Klaus Krippendorff (2004) and Susan Herring (2004). The statistical agreement between three coders as demonstrated in the Intercoder reliability tests indicates that even though many of the categories and sample components included in the coding process demand analytical involvement, the sample can be characterised as valid in this specific use of content analysis.

The content analysis inspired approach has proved useful in order to provide an overview of this sample of YouTube content. It has moreover been argued that YouTube compared to other online streaming sites is the best representative of a general description of audiovisual communication online, at least in regards to the most popular content. As has been argued, this sample is an excerpt of YouTube's most popular content that for instance excludes a focus on social networks and closer and more intimate communities. The data presented here is from a sample with content that is very much based on the promotional strategies of YouTube and dominated by YouTube Partners and professional media producers, which automatically ties the investigation to the popular content of YouTube.

It has also been argued how it has proven very difficult to identify a representative sample that involves content outside the perimeters of the most popular content. This can also be explained by the structure and interface of YouTube as a media platform that generates traffic towards certain content, where only idiosyncratic and random selections of data seem possible. This also includes the current sample, which basically cannot tell us anything about what takes place outside the most popular sphere of YouTube, as I will elaborate on in the next section.

Furthermore, the purpose of using the content analysis was to detect and identify characteristics of UGC and its different forms. Through this identification process, we have been able to provide a picture of a sample with content that is dominated by UGC compared to non-UGC and a sample dominated by texts of non-fiction rather than fiction. It has furthermore been possible to identify the Vlog as a specific group of content that presents a special focus on the creator as a presentation of the self that reflects upon everyday aspects in a subjective and performative mode, distinguishing it from other forms of UGC. As registered in the coding process, the Vlog and other types of UGC moreover signal a shift from what we previously could characterise as artistic and aesthetic modes of expressions towards a more communicative, intertextual and meta-commenting mode of expression that emphasises the communicative skills of individual creators.

YouTube in the context of medium theory and cultural studies

6 – A medium theory inspired approach

The previous chapter provided us with an overview of UGC, from which it could be concluded that Vlogs in particular are most prevalent in this sample. It was also reported that the performative mode of communicating dominated the content, which moreover was identified as predominantly non-fiction, although there was also a high proportion of content registered as a mix between fiction and non-fiction. Even though nothing absolute can be concluded through these registrations, they leave an impression of the subjective role of performing, that is, the act of adopting a specific role in terms of presenting oneself in public and, not the least, in the eyes of other people. It is, I argue, a fundamental aspect of understanding the formation of identity on YouTube, and I will at the end of this chapter more specifically elaborate on the performing aspect of the self, but before doing this, I will examine how YouTube as a media platform also influences the construction of audiovisual identities. A preliminary aim of this chapter is also to understand YouTube as a media phenomenon. This understanding will make it easier to contextualise the content and how we can grasp social behaviour and identity formation within the content.

In the following, I will outline two broad approaches that involve two distinct paradigms of understanding YouTube as a socio-cultural phenomenon, and thus its placement and functionality in our contemporary media society.

The first is the approach that considers media to be a symptom of the media changes in society. Marshall McLuhan is the overall spokesperson of this approach that emphasises the media technologies as the main cause of cultural and social changes in society. His theories together with the work of Harold Innis are the fundament for the so-called "medium theory", which this dissertation will address though the interpretation of the work by Joshua Meyrowitz (1985, 1994).

The second paradigm draws on issues emerging from the context of cultural studies. Cultural studies among others is associated with Raymond Williams, who, contrary to McLuhan, claims that human agency and motivation create technology, which thus only has an effect within the social processes (cf. Williams 1974). Within the context of cultural studies, the receptive aspect is articulated, and it enables us to discuss YouTube agency from a broader perspective.

These two overall approaches in the following will be discussed and aspects of them will be applied in regards to YouTube in order to identify and understand the site as a media platform and how its organisational structure influences the content. This also includes an examination of how we can understand YouTube in regards to social and cultural patterns, its position for agency and organisational structure within and around the content.

6.1 Medium Theory – brief introduction

Medium theory is a historical macro-scale approach that investigates the impact different technologies and media have on society, or as Ronald J. Deibert writes:

> At the heart of medium theory is the argument that changes in modes of communication – such as the shift from primitive orality to writing or the shift from print to electronic communications – have an important effect on the trajectory of social evolution and the values and beliefs of societies (1997, p. 6).

Deibert describes how certain types of communication dominate the different cultural eras. These distinctions originate from Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan's division of different technological

eras. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1995/1962), McLuhan mentions three eras: *The Oral, The Printing* and *The Electronic* eras. Others have also argued for a further distinction between the script and print era (e.g., Elizabeth Eisenstein 2005/1979, Meyrowitz 1994). With the emergence of the computer, the present digital era can also be added, as argued by Deibert (1997) and Finnemann (2005a).

6.2 The first generation of medium theory

The economic and political historian Harold Innis was one of the earliest theorists to propose the potential for technology to impact society, as he writes in his volume *The Bias of Communication*:

> A medium of communication has an important influence on the dissemination of knowledge over space and over time and it becomes necessary to study its characteristics in order to appraise its influence in its cultural setting (1951, p. 33).

With reference to "cultural settings", Innis moreover indicates an awareness of the contextual and social context through which the medium has an impact, in contrast to e.g., Marshall McLuhan, who had a much more one-dimensional view of media, as will be discussed below. Innis focused on how media create two different forms of cultural bias: "time-biased cultures" and "space-biased cultures" as stated in *Empire and Communications*:

> The concepts of time and space reflect the significance of media to civilization. Media that emphasize time are those durable in character (…) Media that emphasize space are apt to be less durable and light in character such as papyrus and paper (2007/1950, pp. 26-27).

According to Innis, specific media dominate certain cultures. Innis presents this with his example of a time-biased culture, where a medium such as hieroglyphics chiselled in stone literally is a heavy and time consuming medium. This leads to a rather stable and controlled society in contrast to a culture dominated by a space-bias, exemplified by Innis referring to papyrus and the alphabet. In contrast, a space-biased culture incorporates a light medium that literally can be produced in a short time period and transported over long distances. One example is the Roman Empire, which could maintain centralised control but at the same time control large territories, which is, however, characterised by greater instability (cf. Stamps 1995, p. 74). Innis proposed a historical dialectic between space and time, which along with the emergence of electronic media, however, gets somewhat blurred. With the emergence of the Internet, which allows us to obtain both oral and printed media, the space-bias and time-bias become even further complicated. John B. Thompson elaborates on the time/space bias in *The Media and Modernity* (1995), as he argues that the relationship between time and space has become more complex and expanded significantly with the "development of new forms of communications" [electronic media] (1995, p. 37).

Innis' main point, as also argued by Niels Finnemann (2005a, p. 112), is that in order to understand the relationship between culture and media, it is necessary to analyse how communication is organised in time and space; and this has been expanded by, e.g., Thompson as well as Giddens, suggesting it is also relevant in regards to YouTube in particular. There is general agreement that media, starting with the telegraph, have enabled communication through distance, which reached its current climax with live-transmission on television or live video chatting on Skype. YouTube is not generally used for live streaming; content is recorded at distinctly different times of the day or night and then uploaded and consumed at various times and different locations. Even though YouTube streams some live events, such as, The Indian Cricket League or big promoted social happenings, it is clear that YouTube does not gain its popularity from sending live transmissions analogous to television. One emphasis is the reorganisation of space in regards to consumption. Television has traditionally been synonymous with consumption within the house, providing homes with news and entertainment from around the world.

With the emergence of wireless Internet in public space and mobile Internet, consumption has become much more dynamic, and thus less dependent on locations, and is no longer situated at home, but has moved into public space and at the same time expanded from national content towards global content with no centralised organisation. This can also be noted in the Video-On-Demand (VOD) structure and the short format of the videos that are suitable for consumption on mobile units. Users consume YouTube content on a global scale wherever and whenever they want.

Another aspect that is influenced by time and space relations is the emergence of paratextual communication i.e., user-interaction that can take place at different times and spatial locations. "Paratext" refers to a framework of elements that describe the main text, in this case the videos, or following Gerard Genette's understanding of the term, paratexts are the elements that serve the function of making a text visible or "to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world" (1997b, p. 3) [Italics in original]. On YouTube, paratextual layers include comment writing and video responding, which are asynchronous to the content and exist parallel to an uploaded video. While a video is uploaded at a specific time, comments may go on for many months and years. This perhaps illustrates how content is constantly being reformulated and re-contextualised, i.e., when new users are watching the same video several years later, and in that way somewhat indicates the so-called long-tail functions, as will be discussed in *8.8*. This furthermore leads to a video-response function, where new content emerges by responding to old content, as well as being recombined as Mashups (cf. *The Mashups of YouTube*). One reason non-live videos are preferable for many creators on YouTube is also the aspect of control (see *7.5*). With the time distance in the communicative situation, the creator can choose through editing how s(he), for instance, creates a version of the self in the video. Users that comment on a specific video are physically anonymous and can hide behind a username, whereas the creator is physically present, but absent in time when, for example, a video was uploaded several years earlier and is still being commented upon. Although negative comments do not seem to increase over time, the distance in terms of the creators' absence clearly indicates that the asynchrony in time and physical absence bring legitimacy to badmouthing and negative comments, as also pointed out by Jörg Bergman (1993) in regards to gossip. The asynchrony makes it difficult to maintain and execute social norms in regards to interaction, for instance what is acceptable to write in a comment or the task of establishing conventional forms of communicating on the site. This also can explain the widespread appearance of the so-called "haters", as they are distanced in both time and space. One example of this is the Vlog *Gingers do have souls*, uploaded by *Coppercab* in the beginning of 2010. The video reflects his personal outrage regarding all the critical comments he receives as a Vlogger. At the time it was uploaded, although it contained many hateful comments, there were also some understanding comments; but some months after the upload, the TV series *South Park* made a parody of the video, which is now automatically linked right to the video. And following that, almost all the comments reflect upon the *South Park* parody, which thus puts the original video into a new satirical context that was assumedly not intended by *Coppercab*, who made the video to encourage people to stop cyber bullying. In that sense, meaning and the comments related to it have been separated by time and space; whereas *Coppercab* might defend himself in a text, he has added, below the video, which can be changed, but the video still has the same message as it had in the beginning of 2010.

Innis has another important point regarding his focus on the "monopoly of knowledge"; he states that media can facilitate and maintain power for certain elite groups of society e.g., the former control of religious societies due to the illiteracy of the people, but which can be broken with the appearance of new media, as he writes in *Empire and Communications*:

> Complexity favoured increasing control under a monopoly of priests and the confinement of knowledge to special classes. Monopoly of knowledge incidental to complexity coincided with the spread of magical writings among the people (2007, p. 44).

Innis demonstrates how knowledge, with the emergence of the printing press, overcame the church's monopoly on writing. A somewhat similar dialogue also takes place in contemporary discussions and arguments regarding how social media have resulted in user-empowerment that has "liberated" users from being passive consumers to becoming active contributors and participants (e.g., Bruns 2008). From a more global perspective, it has also been argued that: the *Twitter revolution* in Iran tested the regime's ability to maintain power; *Wikileaks* has widespread secret information; and with the so-called *Arab spring* in 2011, social media illustrated that in regards to the Internet, it is increasingly becoming more challenging to maintain a "monopoly of knowledge". In terms of YouTube, it is also obvious how ordinary users have become the dominating group producing content. In that sense, we can also apply Innis' model to understand how YouTube, through its organisation of content and interface, enables specific communicative situations that are not live or face-to-face. Furthermore, YouTube also provides VOD access for everybody (with the exception of those countries that block YouTube access) and thereby challenges the notion of a "monopoly of knowledge", accordingly to decrease what is referred to as the technological limitations of access, i.e., the "digital divide"[12] (also see Jenkins 2006). But as will also be argued later (cf. *8.8*), this does *not* necessarily mean that there are no examples of elite groups within YouTube as well or that all content has the same potential for visibility.

While Innis, who focused primarily on oral and print cultures, can be considered the founding father of the so-called Toronto school, which also included, e.g., Eric Havelock, Marshall McLuhan became by far the most noted voice of this school, which Joshua Meyrowitz later coined as the "First generation of Medium Theory" (cf. 1994, p. 51).

6.3 Marshall McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan is one of the most quoted as well as criticised analysts of media. The latter partly because of his status as a popular media guru with catchy slogans and little if any empirical evidence to back them up, but also because his arguments were much more uncompromising than, e.g., Innis, who implied the influence of other contexts besides technology.

McLuhan carries Innis' original ideas about bias of communication towards a focus on media as modes and expressions of human communication situated in time and space, but also through what he calls "the extension of senses":

> The extension of senses (…) Our new electronic technology that extends our senses and nerves in a global embrace has implications for the future of language (1995/1964, p. 80).

Each of the different media eras are characterised by their impact on the senses, and the media thereby have a direct physiological effect, which has been examined by, e.g., Finnemann (2005a). His understanding of the sensory impact moreover has been adapted by several post-modernists, including Donna Harraways in her *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985). I will return to this topic in section *6.9*, and we can furthermore interpret "the extension of senses" somewhat analogously to what the medium offers, the so-called "affordances".

McLuhan was also one of the first to use the term media (cf. Scannell 2007, p. 129), as well as to analyse electronic media. An aphorism such as "The Global Village", which he defines in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1995/1962), is nonetheless more descriptive for the emergence of the Internet than for his own time, as also argued by Paul Levinson (1999, p. 7). McLuhan describes society in the era of electronic media as a "Global Village", i.e., of a single network or a tribe of connected people, where information

[12] According to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_gap, Retrieved November 23, 2011.

is available for all, which hence also predicted the Internet medium: "The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village" (1995/1962, p. 31).

I shall not go further into to McLuhan's work, but briefly comment on his perhaps most famous and discussed term, "The Medium is the Message", as presented in *Understanding Media* (1995/1964), where the medium becomes the message: "because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (p. 9). Rather than the content, which "only blinds us to the character of the medium" (ibid.), it is the form of medium that creates and influences modern society. McLuhan moreover states: "the content of any medium is always another medium" (ibid., p. 8). Although this is somewhat rigorous, as history has also shown how the film and television media have developed their own unique styles (also see Finnemann 2005a, pp. 93-94). Likewise, on YouTube we can also see how communication and behaviour in many ways take their own form, which is different from television (most noticeably in the Internet medium's characteristics, such as hyperlinking, the embedding of emails and instant messaging as well as the possibility of editing and integrating other media forms), but at the same time we cannot ignore that a lot of content of YouTube is in many ways also the content of television and film, just distributed in another context. This emphasises the complexity of distinguishing between the media platform and the content, which is one of the main critique points of the traditional medium theory approach, where the impact of the media alone makes a too narrow argument. I argue that YouTube very well demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between media and content, especially in regards to navigation and making meaning of the content (cf. *Categorising YouTube*).

Returning to McLuhan, his theory is nonetheless also evident in Richard Grusin and Bolter's (1999) understanding of "Remediation" as the emergence of "one medium into another"(p. 45, cf. *6.8*). In general, McLuhan emphasises the forms of media as somewhat similar to what is also being referred to as medium affordances.

Despite the criticisms, many elements of his arguments can be found in present media research. McLuhan's principal argument that media have a huge impact on human behaviour and organisations has been acknowledged, for example, by Anthony Giddens and Joshua Meyrowitz. Meyrowitz applies McLuhan to his media sociological approach where he combines him with Goffman's work. Meyrowitz clearly echoes McLuhan as well as Innis' time/space bias, at the introduction of *No sense of Space*, when he argues that: "Electronic media affects us, then, not primarily through their content, but changing the 'situational geography' of social life" (1985, p. 6). Meyrowitz argues that electronic media have given us access to actions and social behaviour that not only take place in face-to-face situations and physical settings, but just as much in electronic media that result in new communicative situations. Meyrowitz' perspective is tied to medium theory, and his thoughts on media's influence on society can also be applied to this dissertation in terms of YouTube as a media platform, as well as the content itself. Before elaborating on Meyrowitz, I will briefly reflect upon Walter Ong, from whom McLuhan also found inspiration.

6.4 Orality cultures

In his book *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Walter J. Ong focuses on the transformation between oral and print cultures. He argues that the conditions for an oral society are very different from a subsequent printing culture. Without the possibility of recording or print, oral cultures are more dynamic. Ong describes the early oral culture as the "primary orality" (1982, pp. 31-77), and he considers the oral utterance as a form of action – not far from J. L. Austin's (1975) concept of the performative speech act cf. Compared to print cultures, oral cultures are situational and create "a flow of narration" (ibid., p.

37) in which meaning is retold through narratives that can be memorised and can be used to comprehend abstract cultural categories:

> From the narration, certain generalizations or abstract conclusions can be formulated (…) [Oral cultures] use stories of human action to store, organize, and communicate much of what they know" (ibid., p. 140).

This has also generated a group-structure in the oral culture, where people gather and share memories and create knowledge in terms of group participation. Although Ong only focussed on oral communication and the written word, paying little attention to the visual, his approach is nonetheless interesting in regards to YouTube. With a brief reference to electronic media, Ong advocates for a "secondary orality" which describes a cultural shift that puts the emphasis back on the oral culture. This orality is of course somewhat different than the primary orality:

> With telephone, radio, television and various kinds of sound tape, electronic technology has brought us into the age of 'secondary orality'. This new orality has striking resemblance to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment (…) But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print (…) In our age of secondary orality, we are group-minded self-consciously and programmatically (ibid., p. 136).

On YouTube, Ong's secondary orality is especially relevant in regards to the oral communication that takes place in the content (e.g., through voiceover). In light of how meaning is generated through "secondary orality", which is also analogous to Richard Chalfen's characteristics of home movies, which he characterises as "visual redundancy", narratives takes place through "verbal telling and re-telling" (1987, p. 70). On YouTube, there is a similar tendency to tell rather than show with pictures (also see *Representations on YouTube*). This aspect is also reflected on YouTube in the many comments linked to the videos, which can furthermore take on a characteristic form, involving a phatic form of communication. Moreover, with Ong's emphasis on "self-consciousness", orality can also be mirrored in the tendency to reflect and explain the self through the use of self-reflexivity and meta-comments that can be found within many of the videos on YouTube.

Finally, with his emphasis on the impact of technology, Ong's theory corresponds with McLuhan, but at the same time, he characterises social interaction as "intersubjective" and thus involves a receptive perspective that cannot be found in McLuhan's media model (ibid., p. 177). Ong has thereby broadened the often-criticised one-dimensional focus on technology, which has also been the most persistent critique of the early medium theorists and which led Joshua Meyrowitz to formulate his own understanding of medium theory.

6.5 Joshua Meyrowitz: The second generation of Medium Theory

Joshua Meyrowitz has become the most noted spokesperson of a revisited approach to Innis and McLuhan's theories. He refers to his own theory among others as the "Second generation of Medium Theory" (cf. 1994, p.58). Although Meyrowitz adapts McLuhan's theory, he is also critical of McLuhan, when he formulates his understanding of medium theory in *No Sense of Space*:

> The medium theorists do not suggest that the means of communication wholly shape culture and personality, but they argue that changes in communication patterns are one very important contribution to social change (1985, p. 18).

Meyrowitz instead proposes an understanding of media effects that is placed in a contextual and more dynamic relationship between media environment and "social settings", by involving a dimension of social behaviour influenced by media. Concretely, Meyrowitz is thus also critical of the early media theories because according to him they only focus on the effects of media changes, while lacking the

"structural aspects of face-to-face interaction" (1985, p. 4). Meyrowitz in that sense is not far from Ong's emphasis on the dynamic principles of social interaction as intersubjective and for that matter also Innis' "cultural settings" (cf. *6.2*). This objection to the early medium theory approach, especially represented by McLuhan, also points forward to Meyrowitz' own media sociological perspective. He draws on Erving Goffman and integrates his views on social situations, in contrast to the previous medium theory that "offers little competition for the mainstream television content studies in terms of concrete, comprehensible effects of electronic media on *everyday social behaviour*" (ibid., p. 23) [Italics in original]. This leads to a comprehension of medium theory in which social behaviour is overtly tied to social communication (cf. Meyrowitz 1994, p. 58). From within this approach, Meyrowitz raises a fundamental question regarding medium theory, in his article *Medium Theory* (1994), which is at the same time identical to his overall investigation in *No Sense of Space* (1985):

> What are the relatively fixed features of each means of communicating and how do these features make the medium physically, psychologically, and socially different from other media and from face-to-face interaction? (1994, p. 50).

Meyrowitz' question is highly relevant for the content on YouTube, where especially social behaviour in the videos and in regards to the social role adopted in the videos can usefully be explained by Meyrowitz' approach, as elaborated in detail in *No Sense of Space*. Especially his approach to performative behaviour as an impact of media has been applied to this project, e.g., in *The Performative Way of YouTube*. Meyrowitz is interested in the impact media have on social interaction and how access to information can be bridged to social situations and settings. This is manifested in his fusing of McLuhan and Goffman and includes a focus on physical settings, but also mediated settings such as adapting specific roles when appearing in public or in private space. These aspects have been discussed in two of the articles in this dissertation (*Presentations of the self on YouTube* and *The Performative Way of YouTube*). I will, however, briefly reflect on the fact that Meyrowitz, in his approach in most cases, maintains his focus on social interaction and behaviour through a comparison between forms of communication in electronic media with face-to-face situations. This also places him somewhere in the perimeters of "symbolic interactionism" when referring to George Herbert Mead's "generalized other" (1985, p. 131 and 2005, p. 22). It is a highly relevant perspective in regards to identity formation on YouTube, as I shall return to in *8.10*.

While Meyrowitz' focus on social roles and communicative situations is important, his analysis tends to ignore the actual "grammatical language" of the content as well as the institutional aspects, as he also recognises in the article *Medium Theory*:

> The medium theory view of the unique feature of global electronic media gives us tremendous insight into the power and potential of our new technologies. But the content/institutional perspective allows us to observe how the selective use and foci of the global spotlight intersect with issues of power, ideology, economics, and journalistic conventions (1994, p. 73).

As Meyrowitz states, medium theory is most useful in a macro-scale analysis of the long-term consequences of technology, but also by applying contextual aspects involving social interaction, institutional aspects as well as the content. Meyrowitz' work has not been completely described here, but since I will refer to Meyrowitz throughout this dissertation, especially in the following analysis as well in the articles, I will not go into further detail regarding Meyrowitz' media sociology here.

6.6 Medium theory critique

Raymond Williams, among others, is especially sceptical of what is often referred to as "technological determinism". It is a critique that in most examples is addressed at McLuhan and his tendency to emphasise technology as the only cause of social changes. This also includes his famous aphorism "The Medium is the Message" and statements like: "it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (1995/1964, p. 9).

Williams' criticism is also directed towards McLuhan's focus on media as the "extensions of senses", due to the aphorism's inherent physical emphasis that excludes any contextual parameters:

> The physical fact of instant transmission, as a technical possibility, has been uncritically raised to a social fact, without any pause to notice that virtually all such transmission is at once selected and controlled by existing social authorities (…) what has to be seen, by contrast, is the radically different position in which technology, including communication technology, and specifically television, is at once an intention and an effect of a particular social order (1997, p. 128).

Williams argues against determinism in terms of the role of technology, since it neglects the presence of a social, political or economic intentionality. Williams further emphasises the possibility of unforeseen effects of the intentional reading, as he states in regards to literacy and the Bible: "A controlled intention became an uncontrolled effect" (ibid., p. 131). Williams thereby turns the focus towards the importance of the reception, thus outlining a fundamental characteristic of the tradition of cultural studies that also advocates a notion of polysemic readings, which I shall return to in chapter 8.

Another even more critical voice is that of Umberto Eco in his critique of McLuhan's mantra the "Medium is the Message". In his essay *Cogito Interruptus*, Eco on the contrary declares:

> The medium is *not* the message; the message becomes what the receiver makes of it, applying to it his own codes of reception, which are neither those of the sender nor those of the scholar of communications (1995, p. 235) [Italics in original].

Eco's critique of McLuhan is substituted with his own emphasis on the receiver as the main focus, as he underlines on the following page: "the message depends on the reading given it" (ibid., p. 236). Eco is primarily sceptical of how McLuhan seems incapable of successfully distinguishing between the medium, the content or its audience. It is a fundamental critique of Medium Theory that has also been re-emphasised in regards to the emergence and complexity of the Internet (cf. McQuail 2010, p. 143).

Although the theories of McLuhan and Innis' have been re-launched and widely accepted, at least in regards to media's influence and effect on culture and society, the statements above, combined with a fundamental lack of empirical evidence, have resulted in a general tendency to downgrade technology's inherent ability to change society as the only factor, and to turn the focus towards the coexistence of other factors (e.g., Ong 1982, Meyrowitz 1985, Deibert 1997, Finnemann 2005b). This has lead to a more contextual approach to medium theory, which I will also apply here, where the technological impact is considered less autonomous. This also involves Meyrowitz, who represents a movement towards a more pragmatic understanding of medium theory that moreover is echoed in, for instance, Ronald Jay Deibert's approach to medium theory, which, however, also moves towards social constructivism

6.7 An "ecologist holistic" approach

Deibert shares Meyrowitz' focus on the social interaction that takes place in media environments, as he describes in his book *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia* (1997). But at the same time, Deibert turns the focus away from media's inherent effects and situates media in a social constructivists context. He,

however, stresses that media have "*unforeseen effects*" (1997, p. 29) [italics in original]. Deibert therefore attempts to bridge medium theory and social constructivism into what he refers to as an "'ecological holist' picture of human existence" (ibid., p. 37). Thus, he sees media as an environment that is fundamentally based on two assumptions, where the first assumption argues (citing Russell Neuman):

> (…) that specific communication environments have a certain 'logic' or 'nature' not in any determinist sense, but only in the sense of "making" human communications of certain types easier or more difficult (ibid., p. 32).

The second assumption is "that society is made up of discernible social forces" (ibid., p. 32) that describe the social constructivist direction. Hence, social agency is bridged with a medium theory approach that rejects technological determinism and is analogous to Meyrowitz' fusion of "medium theory": "the study of different cultural environments" and "situationism"; "the ways in which social behaviour is shaped by and in each other" (1985, p. 16).

Deibert's description of media as having a certain "logic" is moreover analogous to what we understand as the principles behind media characteristics or what are also referred to as "affordances".

Before going into this, I shall briefly dwell on how Deibert also involves a reflection along the line of social constructivism that places itself in a somewhat moderated version of postmodernism, where the self is described as multiple and "continuously being reconstructed". This point of view can also be recognised in Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler's description of the self as a process of quotations, as discussed in *The Performative Ways of YouTube*. Deibert, however, is primarily interested in the symbolic forms constructed, e.g., online, as he sees as the most suitable description of the Internet (hypermedia environment):

> Postmodern notions of 'decentred' selves, pastiche-like, intertextual spatial biases, multiple realities and worlds, and fragmented imagined communities 'fit' the hypermedia environment where personal information is dispersed along computer networks and privacy is rapidly dissolving (…) where narrowcasting and two-way communications are undermining mass 'national' audiences and encouraging nonterritorial 'niche' communities (ibid., p. 205).

Deibert argues that this notion fits "the hypermedia" environment or in everyday terms: The Internet. It also fits the description of YouTube in terms of how people are capable of presenting multiple versions of the self and furthermore how intertextuality dominates a lot of communication that takes place in the content.

Although Deibert is not entirely adapting Jean Baudrillard's thoughts on simulacra, he refers to virtual and imagined worlds of the Internet that had a lot of attention in the early days of the Internet according to the volume being written in 1997. As I also attempt to advocate in *The Performative Way of YouTube* and in *8.10,* the ways identity is presented on YouTube are perhaps symbolic mediated forms, but they are at the same time inherently tied to the historical and social reality that Deibert's model of imagined communities does not include.

6.8 Remediations

Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin apply an interpretation of McLuhan's statement that "the content of any medium is always another medium". Bolter and Grusin take a genealogical medium theory approach in their volume *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), in which they examine the characteristics of media aesthetics. They make the fundamental argument that a great deal of new media content has adopted forms and codes from already existing media (e.g., television, film and photography) (cf. 1999,

p. 15). They explain this through their concept of remediation, which is straightforward: "the representation of one medium in another" (ibid., p. 45). The principle of remediation manifests itself in two overall logics that are overtly interconnected. This is "transparent immediacy" (1999, p. 24) and "hypermediacy" (ibid., p. 31). The two types of remediation are two interrelated logics of representation that have both an epistemological and psychological sense:

> Immediacy (…) It is the notion that a medium could erase itself and leave the viewer in the presence of the objects represented (…) In its psychological sense, immediacy names the viewer's feeling that the medium has disappeared and a feeling that his experience is therefore authentic (…) Hypermediacy also has two corresponding senses. In its epistemological, hypermediacy is opacy – the fact that knowledge of the world comes to us through media (…) The psychological sense of hypermediacy is the experience that she has in and of the presence of media that (…) is itself an experience of the real" (1999, pp. 70-71).

This describes two forms of basic representation, where immediacy is the transparent invisible style that maintains the viewer's experience of a diegetic world of the text and provides an impression of authenticity, while hypermediacy presents a distance towards the text that is being experienced as a construction and thus being reminded of reality, which according to them also results in an impression of authenticity: "The excess of media becomes an authentic experience"(1999, p. 53). This experience takes place as we witness the very process of construction that turns the viewing experience into a self-confirming process. This is an emphasis on reflexivity that is also echoed in Bill Nichol's emphasis on the reflexive mode of documentary representation (cf. *3.6*). The question, however, remains if the experience is still an experience of excess as, e.g., intended by, e.g., Bertolt Brecht. With the increased integration of media in everyday life, audience poses as a certain "meta consciousness of media", where reflexivity is increasingly becoming a natural mode of communicating authenticity (also see Bondebjerg 2002, p. 178), challenging the idea of excess or distance that perhaps instead communicates transparency (cf. *Mashups on YouTube* and *Presenting the self on YouTube*).

Bolter and Grusin argue that hypermediacy dominates the Internet in terms of a "multiplicity of windows and the heterogeneity of their content" (ibid., p. 33). This must be respectfully regarded within the perspective that the book was written in 1999, pointing towards the early days of the Internet, where "Virtual Reality" was a buzzword and for Bolter and Grusin synonymous with immediacy, while the Internet in general was synonymous with hypermediacy. One could argue that what was being considered heterogenic in 1999 is perhaps now being considered homogenous. As elaborated in *The Mashups of YouTube*, Richard Grusin (2009) also rethinks the original understanding of remediation and argues that in reference to, e.g., YouTube, rather than formal distinctions, it is perhaps more accurate to describe how we can understand the logics of remediation in regards to *connectivity*, thereby advocating a social dimension of remediation. In regards to YouTube, Bolter and Grusin's notion on remediation is nevertheless descriptive of how much content is constructed through using already existing content from, e.g., television and film.

But the distinctive ways of navigating and consuming content on YouTube pose the question of whether we can still consider remediation defined by the same principal logics. For instance, if a video on YouTube is equipped with many different links, tags, signs and multiple functions of communication and interaction is this then still an example hypermediacy? As also mentioned by Grusin (2009), the functionality of links and different tools of user-interaction that are presented together with a video is the principle feature behind connecting people and strengthening the notion of the medium's invisibility. This also raises the question whether the presence of self-reflexivity and self-reflexivity in the content of many videos is considered hypermediacy, since it perhaps no longer evokes the similar psychological sense originally associated with hypermediacy in terms of media "excess". The main shift is perhaps that this form of hypermediacy on YouTube is not a formal or artistic

component, but rather a communicative component that above all communicates transparency towards a shared community.

The concept of remediation moreover reflects the genealogical principle in terms of highlighting how earlier media refashion and integrate content from digital media. Many reality shows and talk shows as well as radio programmes have implemented more user-interactive features and it is not usual to use YouTube videos as documentation in news-programmes. We furthermore see many examples of remediations accordingly in an increasing deployment of cross-media marketing strategies, where media companies embed their content on other platforms and correspondingly remediate this content. Overall, this also draws a picture of a complex media culture, where content is not limited to existing on one platform, but can be distributed, consumed and shaped by each medium's characteristics, but where digital media and electronic media intertwine. For this reason, it is also beneficial not to consider television and YouTube as two diametrically opposite phenomena (also see *7.1*).

6.9 Affordances

Meyrowitz argues that "media are types of social settings that include and exclude, unite and divide people in particular ways" (1985, p. 70). In that sense, a medium provides different modes of social interaction that other media do not. This is similar to how McLuhan emphasises that each historic media era is dominated by one of the senses and to how Innis argues that cultural periods are either time or space dominated. This focus on the specific characteristics can be summarised in what we can also understand as "affordances". From a "conversational analytical" perspective, Ian Hutchby states that:

> New communications technologies often bring about new possibilities for communicative action and interaction. The affordances of such technologies – the possibilities, enablements and constraints that they make available – are realized in the interplay between technological forms and our practical uses and applications of such forms (2006, p. 166).

One way to investigate how YouTube content may well be remediations of already existing content, but at the same time in a different format, is to investigate what distinguishes YouTube as a media platform. The term "affordance", as referred to by Hutchby above, is useful here in order to understand how YouTube functions, and how this may affect the organisation and interaction in and around the content. Hutchby dismisses the deterministic aspect of medium theory when he stresses that the affordances are first and foremost the possibilities and constraints in the usage. Hutchby integrates a functionality of the medium as he states that technology is not deterministic because: "it is not to claim that human actors are necessarily caused to react in given ways to technological forms" (2001, p. 29). But on the other hand, Hutchby is even more sceptical of the social constructivist approach, e.g., represented by Grint and Woolgar (1997). Hutchby is especially critical of their dismissal of technology's ability to possess any characteristics as an object, as they consider technology a text that itself is always neutral, and instead defined by the interpretations of the artefact that they ultimately regard as a discursive construction (Hutchby 2001, pp. 28-29). Hutchby, in contrast, sees a clear distinction between text and technology, since there are inherent constraints that determine general limitations of how an object can be used. He illustrates this with the differences between a fruit machine and a telephone. Likewise, it can also be argued that the radio is limited to broadcast audio waves, while television can also show pictures. Hutchby thereby also situates himself along the lines of Deibert, when stating that rather than affordances determined by technology, affordances are controlled by a logic or "negotiations" of possibilities (ibid., p, 28).

The term affordance derives from James Gibson (1986), who from a perceptual psychological perspective considers an affordance to be the actions an object can offer for its users, where users in

Gibson's terminology involve all organisms. As Gibson simultaneously argues, an affordance is invariant; it does not change according to different needs:

> The characteristics of an environmental medium are that it affords respiration or breathing: it permits locomotion (…) All these offerings of nature, these possibilities or opportunities, these *affordances* as I will call them, are invariant. They have been strikingly constant throughout the whole evolution of animal life" (1986, pp. 18-19) [Italics in original].

This description of affordances was adapted by Donald Norman to describe the relationship between humans and technology, and who in *The Design of Everyday Things* includes what he calls "perceived affordances" (2002, p. 9) that follow Hutchby's and Gibson's arguments, when he extends the understanding of an affordance to include the agent's motivations, values and experiences. This draws attention towards the functionality of affordances, and like Hutchby, Norman thereby includes human action as independent from technological determinism.

Hutchby additionally underlines that "the full range of affordance of any object cannot be available to immediate perception" (2001, p. 28). He implies that user-interaction is present, since occasionally one needs to learn how to use the object or adapt the practices about it. Finally, this can also be related to Paddy Scannell, when he argues that affordances also include "discoverable features of the things themselves" (2007, p. 141).

If we look at YouTube, an affordance is what the site offers as possibilities to its users, but it is also clear that in regards to YouTube, users need to learn how to navigate and interact with the site. The discoverable features also involve less obvious possibilities, such as subscribing, or how to register, while other consequences of YouTube's functionality such as accessibility, creator control, sociability, and intertextuality[13] may also be considered affordances.

I will consider affordances of YouTube in terms of how they refer to media properties that are concerned with communicative actions on the site. This includes for example: uploading, writing tags, comment writing, rating, linking, video responding, subscribing, thematic categorising, favouring videos, writing emails, advertising, making playlists as well as receiving and reading data (demographic and static data on videos). It does not serve any purpose to include all the affordances of YouTube just as it does not make sense to involve all the affordances of YouTube as an audiovisual medium which are identical with already existing media platforms. The affordances discussed here therefore will be limited to the ones that either explicitly affect the communication of content, discoverable features and consequences of distributing content on YouTube.

6.10 summing up

It has been demonstrated how medium theory founded in the work of Innis and McLuhan has proven insightful in its focus on how media and technology effect society. But as stated by critics of medium theory, it is rather easy to reject the early arguments in terms of technological determinism and lack of empirical evidence.

This critique is primarily targeted at McLuhan, since Innis addresses a wider perspective on medium theory, although his theory appears, as mentioned by, e.g., Deibert, as a somewhat incomplete perspective on media. That being said, Innis' time/space bias applies to more recent sociologists like Anthony Giddens (1991) and John Thompson (1995). The notion of "monopoly of knowledge" is also

[13] E.g. Askehave and Nielsen refer to intertextuality as an affordance (cf. 2004, p. 11).

a point of discussion that has found its way into the arguments for user-empowerment; I will return to this in regards to a discussion of issues in recent cultural studies' grounded approaches to social media.

Moreover, many of McLuhan's aphorisms have proved descriptive in understanding the contemporary media environment, including statements such as "the content of any medium is always the content of another medium", which although rightfully adjusted, has also been applied by Bolter and Grusin to coin their notion of "Remediation", which includes a lot of the content on YouTube. This is simultaneously moderated by the influence of YouTube's different affordances that organise and present the content in a specific way somewhat different from other forms of audiovisuality on other media platforms.

More recently, medium theory has taken a further contextual approach that considers additional aspects moreover include content as an important feature. Joshua Meyrowitz is the main spokesperson of this approach, where others like Deibert (1997), Logan (2004) and Finnemann (2005a) have applied more nuanced perspectives of medium theory. Danish researchers like Stig Hjarvard (2008) and Klaus Bruhn Jensen (2010) also work at the perimeters of medium theory, where these approaches share the emphasis on human interaction and communication with media and the effects of this.

Medium theory must first and foremost be considered an overall macro-scaled framework that enables us to identify the relationship between YouTube as a media platform and the characteristic of self presentation and social behaviour within the content. From the medium theory approach, affordances are perhaps the most concrete and useful tool to present an overview of the distinctions of YouTube as a media platform and what it offers to its users.

Finally, it has also been argued that the main critique of medium theory lies in the association with McLuhan's technological determinism that tends to blur the possibility of distinguishing the medium from its content, downplaying contextual elements.

7 - YouTube as a media platform

7.1 Digital media

In this current project, I will refer to what has been considered the distinction between old and new media as a distinction between electronic media (exemplified by television) and digital media (exemplified by the Internet). However, I will not dwell on the digital and electronic media in general, but more specifically in regards to YouTube as a representative of a digital media platform and television as an example of electronic media. YouTube is not a medium, but a certain type of software. It is an online channel that streams audiovisual online and the principle of this is similar to many other online streaming platforms on the Internet. I will therefore refer to YouTube as an example of a media platform, i.e., as a specific application of the Internet medium analogous to an online television channel.

7.2 Generation YouTube - how television and the Internet have merged

Following the more contextualised focus of medium theory, it is also relevant to involve a focus on how YouTube is consumed by the audience as well as YouTube's status as a media platform in correspondence with electronic media represented by television. It is, however, beyond the scope of this dissertation to identify and analyse audience behaviour. I will instead draw on already existing aspects of potential YouTube audiences. This involves references to reports and surveys on the role of electronic and digital media. Alexa.com furthermore monitors the web, including YouTube demographics, and according to the statistical demographics of YouTube, the audience seems to follow general Internet consumers. There is, nonetheless, a slight predominance of users between 18-24 years old, equally divided between males and females, as can be seen in Figure 20 below.

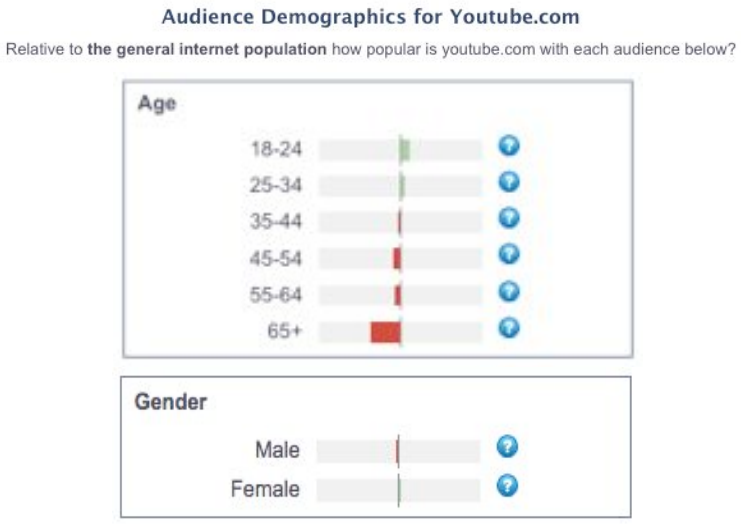


Figure 20: *The YouTube audience (cf. alexa.com)*

Don Tapscott has described in his book, *grown up digital* (2009), different demographic groups in regards to the Internet. According to him, most of the users and creators of YouTube are part of the group he refers to as "The Net Generation", who "grew up surrounded by digital media" (2009, p. 2). This group includes people born in the late 1970s an onwards (ibid., p.15) and thus includes the slightly predominant age group of YouTube users.

A significant characteristic of the Net-Gen is that technology has become transparent. According to Tapscott, young users do not reflect upon technology, it is just something that is there (ibid., p. 19). The transparency of technology is also touched upon by Susan Herring (2008a) as something changeable, as she exemplifies with a distinction between a mobile phone with standard features and a mobile with new features, where only the latter is considered technology, since as she states: "For something to be 'technology', in other words, it should be novel, challenging, and fun" (2008, p. 77). The changeability of technology can perhaps also be applied to YouTube, which in itself may be considered boring and uninteresting, but when new features such as annotations occur, it adds a temporary playful dimension to its functionality (also see *Mashups of YouTube*).

Nevertheless, Tapscott considers television as a media soon to be abandoned, which is increasingly being used simultaneously with other media:

> A Net Gener is more likely to turn on the computer and simultaneously interact in several different windows, talk on the telephone, listen to music (…) and watch television. TV has become like background Muzak for them (2009., p. 20).

Tapscott implies that television has been outperformed by the Internet and has been reduced to Muzak. He furthermore questions its democratic potential (ibid., p. 260), while he draws a rather uncritical picture of digital media and the consuming Net Generation as smarter, more democratic and more active than previous generations (ibid., p. 30). Tapscott's euphoric argument seems, however, too one-dimensional or too digitally technologically deterministic, as he is basically making a distinction between television and Internet differentiated by a passive and less democratic television audience and active and smarter Internet users. The Internet may well offer more widespread possibilities for accessibility and user-interaction, but far from all users adopt these functions. And in regards to YouTube, many users consume content exactly like on the television including the Net Geners that are described by Tapscott as a fundamentally homogenous group, a statement that also tends to ignore that television and the Internet may well be co-existing.

In the following, I will refer to different reports and surveys of the topic and discuss how a more heterogeneous approach may be more fruitful when examining the relationship between the Internet and television. I will address television as a medium, which, rather than being in competition or subordinated to the Internet, exists as a contemporary and remediated co-existing medium. In the previous paragraph, I argued for an overall differentiation between electronic media and digital media, exemplified by television and the Internet, but at the same time it is essential to stress that television is nowadays nonetheless consumed and distributed within a digital media environment. This is why a differentiated comparison between television as a representative of electronic media and the Internet of digital media is perhaps better thought of as a historical distinction between the Internet and television as it was before the emergence of digital media and not television as of 2012. Television is per se a media technology invented in the era of electronic media, but television no longer exists in this specific form and its affordances are developing accordingly and adjusting to the Internet. Now television is distributing and communicating content as a cross-media platform that in addition to the traditional TV channel includes: online websites with news feeds, android and iPhone apps, production of computer games, YouTube channels and other online channels that provide its viewers with a VOD function we also know from YouTube. This seems to be ignored by Tapscott, when he draws a homogenous picture of the Net Generation as clearly separated from other groups in terms of their status as Internet users.

7.3 The contemporary role of television

In 2003, a report ("Born to be wired"[14]) declared that teenagers now spend more time on the Internet than on television and that television has been reduced to background music. These arguments can be found in many volumes examining the impact of digital media. Television is for example also downplayed by Chris Anderson, who states: "Males age eighteen to thirty-four are starting to turn off the TV altogether, shifting more and more of their screen time to the Internet" (2006, p. 2).

Although these arguments sound very convincing, since more and more information and communication take place on the Internet, other reports nonetheless suggest a reason to discuss these arguments, since they also consider in which context YouTube must be understood.

The annual Nielsen *Three Screen Report* (2010) compares consumption of television, online video and mobile phone screenings. Drawing on a survey, the report argues that consumption of media time is increasing, but it is simultaneously stated that television still dominates the market of media consumption (cf. Figure 21). According to their figures, television is at the same time significantly more consumed than the Internet, where the time spent on the net in the same period has decreased from the first quarter of 2009 to the first quarter of 2010.

Monthly Time Spent in Hours:Minutes Per User 2+					
	Q1 2010	Q4 2009	Q1 2009	% Diff Yr to Yr	Hrs:Min Diff Yr to Yr
Watching TV in the home*	158:25	153:47	156:24	+ 1.3%	+ 2:01
Watching Timeshifted TV*	9:36	9:13	8:22	+ 14.7%	+ 1:14
Using the Internet on a PC**	25:26	26:32	29:15	-13.1%	- 3:49
Watching Video on Internet**	3:10	3:22	3:00	+ 5.9%	+ 0:11
Mobile Subscribers Watching Video on a Mobile Phone^	3:37	3:37	3:37	Flat	0:00

Source: The Nielsen Company. Based on total users of each medium.
Note: TV viewing patterns in the US tend to be seasonal, with TV usage higher in the winter months and lower in the summer months, sometimes leading to a decline in quarter to quarter usage.

Figure 21: *Time spent on monthly media consumption (cf. Three Screen Report)*

What Figure 21 does not reveal, however, is how much time people spend watching YouTube on their TVs instead of their computers, as TV manufacturers have started to embed YouTube directly into the apparatus.

Table 5

Monthly Time Spent in Hours:Minutes – Age Demographic Q1 2010								
	A2-11	T12-17	A18-24	A25-34	A35-49	A50-64	A65+	P2+
On Traditional TV*	114:04	108:05	124:22	143:32	161:51	195:17	218:48	158:25
Watching Timeshifted TV*	6:48	5:54	7:04	13:30	12:36	11:01	5:47	9:36
Using the Internet on a PC**	4:28	8:16	22:28	30:16	32:29	28:14	22:53	25:26
Watching Video on Internet**	1:24	2:09	5:33	4:30	3:34	2:20	1:27	3:10
Mobile Subscribers Watching Video on a Mobile Phone^	n/a^^	7:13	5:47	3:15	2:53	2:10	1:44	3:37

Source: The Nielsen Company. Based on total users of each medium.

Figure 22: *Time spent on monthly media consumption – divided by age (cf. Three Screen Report)*

[14] cf. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3078614/ns/technology_and_science-tech_and_gadgets/t/teens-tune-out-tv-log-instead/#.TszmFPFgOpI, Retrieved November 23, 2011.

Figure 22 shows that individuals in the demographic groups K2-A24 watch less TV than those in other groups. And according to the report, television usage, within this age group, nonetheless, is significantly more predominant compared to Internet usage (ranging from 5:54-7:04 hours/month), where Internet usage is less than for other demographic age groups. The report therefore demonstrates that the differentiation between Net Geners and individuals in other groups is more complex and that we need to distinguish within the groups themselves as will be discussed in *8.4*.

A Danish study [15] (*TNS Gallup TV-Meter* (2011)) of television consumption shows a similar development based on a survey of television use from 2008-2011 (cf. Figure 23). The individuals between 12-25 years old spend the least amount of time watching TV, and although their time spent viewing television (the red line) has slightly decreased from 2010, their overall consumption has significantly increased during the last 3 years.

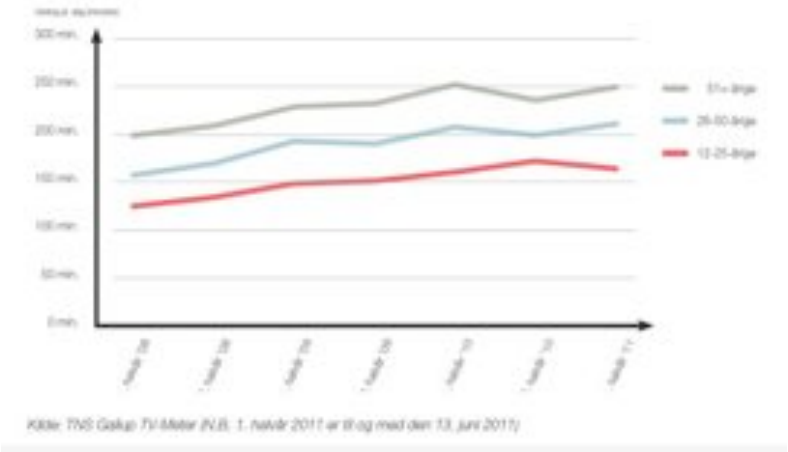


Figure 23: *Danish Television Consumption divided by age (January 2008-May 2011)*

A third survey conducted by Deloitte[16] also indicates that television still dominates the consumption of audiovisual communication, but at the same time it indicates that usage has simultaneously changed. According to the Deloitte report, television programmes are one of the most popular topics that American Internet users discuss, including the Net Gens, as illustrated in Figure 24:

[15] Cf. Sørensen and Bølling (2011): http://www.omdintouch.dk/2011/07/socialt-tv-de-digitale-medier-stormer-frem-men-hvad-med-tv/.
[16] The report was found on: http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1008301, Retrieved August 2, 2011.

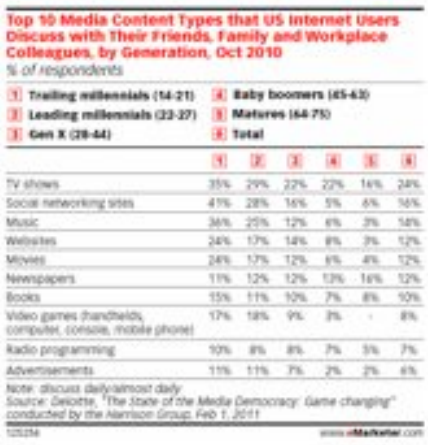


Figure 24: *Types of content discussed by Internet users*

The report suggests that television is increasingly integrating user interaction as a strategy for canalising content online, while concluding: "TV remains powerful, especially when combined with the Internet" (cf. *The fifth edition of Deloitte's annual State of the Media Democracy survey*). Finally these studies are also supported by a recent report made by *Accenture*, which states that television watching is progressively being associated with multitasking:

> Consumers are still watching traditional TV, but they're also viewing content over an amazing range of other devices and interacting with content and people during the viewing experience (cf. *Accenture report* 2011, p. 4).

While the television is on, the report states that 77% of the participants answering the survey perform multiple activities while watching television. People no longer just watch television. They simultaneously use Twitter, Facebook and YouTube on other communication tools like cell-phones, iPads and laptops. This is, however, also what Tapscott argues in regards to the Net Gen: "Multitasking is natural for this generation (2009, p. 42). However, he ignores the continuous impact of television, which, as the Deloitte report also indicates, is very much evident in the topics being discussing on Social Network Sites (SNS) and therefore not solely background noise, since the content is actually being discussed.

The *Accenture report* furthermore supports the argument that consumption of television has somewhat changed and reflects and mirrors the tendencies of social media, including the ways of consuming content on YouTube, and what we can consider an example of cross-media culture, where users can consume the same content and interact with it throughout several media, or when television news extends its stories to other platforms including YouTube content as documentation (cf. *6.8*). For instance, CNN frequently links to their YouTube channel from their main TV channel and on certain occasions.

The reason for involving these findings and reports is to stress that YouTube is situated in a media environment where content is consumed by the "Net Gen" in co-existence with television content and not necessarily in contrast to it as otherwise indicated by, e.g., Tapscott (2009). Jostein Gripsrud, in the introduction to the volume *Relocating Television*, also addresses the relationship between television and digital media as he writes: "What goes on is a restructuring of the entire public sphere. Less than ever can television be studied and understood in isolation from its contexts" (2010, p. xv).

Similarly, we experience many forms of hybrids within UCG on YouTube that also underline the bridge between television and digital media, but at the same time, YouTube as a specific media platform has also developed new modes of audiovisual content as a consequence of this co-existence, but uniquely formed by YouTube's affordances and settings within media environment.

7.4 YouTube as Web 2.0

When we discuss YouTube, nevertheless, it is from many different perspectives. But one shared factor is often the term social media. The term articulates YouTube as a content community where users consume, but also share and interact with audiovisual content. It is also an aspect suggested by the official YouTube logo:

Figure 25: *Official YouTube Logo*

The slogan "Broadcast Yourself"[17] is a performative imperative that encourages users to participate and to publish themselves. The slogan was added in 2006 and was followed by the often quoted front-page from *Time Magazine* in December 2006 that proclaimed "You" as the person of the year (see, e.g., van Dijck 2009). This implicitly changed the focus away from the medium towards the user, where social media is associated with what many identify as the revolutionary development of the Internet from the so-called Web 1.0 into Web 2.0. The term "Web 1.0" did not exist as term before the emergence of the term Web 2.0. Web 1.0 primarily refers to the first stage of the Internet's history, where personal webpages were connected through hyperlinks (cf. Manovich 2001) and were still a part of the Internet, just as the Email basically involves the read and write characteristics of Web 2.0 (see Figure 26), but Emails existed before the emergence of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 therefore does not refer to an updated version of the Internet, but the term rather describes two overall aspects of the development of the Internet. First, is the emergence of user generated content (UGC) and social media: i.e., the social functionality of the Internet. Second, Web. 2.0 implies the re-definition of the Internet in regards to business structures and strategies as argued by, e.g., Tim O'Reilly when he coined the term in 2004 as a consequence of the 2001 dot.com crash.

O'Reilly (2005) predominantly emphasises the social dimension of Web 2.0, and therein the concept of participation (see Figure 26), and "collective intelligence" that are embedded in social networks. This is most noticeably exemplified in Wikipedia, social network sites (SNS) and the emergence of blogging communities and citizen journalism (cf. Lister et al. 2009, p. 206). O'Reilly has outlined an overview of what he sees as the main differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. An overall development is the step from Web 1.0 as "read only" towards Web 2.0 as a two-way "read and write" process, manifested in the rise of social media and social networks: for example, Delicious, Dropbox, Facebook, Flickr, LinkedIn, Google+, MySpace, Twitter, Wikipedia and YouTube (cf. O'Reilly 2005, Lister et al. 2009, Hirst 2011).

[17] YouTube has of December 2011 changed the appearance of their logo, which no longer states "broadcast yourself", although the site still uses the slogan.

Web 1.0		Web 2.0
DoubleClick	-->	Google AdSense
Ofoto	-->	Flickr
Akamai	-->	BitTorrent
mp3.com	-->	Napster
Britannica Online	-->	Wikipedia
personal websites	-->	blogging
evite	-->	upcoming.org and EVDB
domain name speculation	-->	search engine optimization
page views	-->	cost per click
screen scraping	-->	web services
publishing	-->	participation
content management systems	-->	wikis
directories (taxonomy)	-->	tagging ("folksonomy")
stickiness	-->	syndication

Figure 26*: Comparison between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 Cf. Tim O'Reilly (2005)*

The figure above includes concrete examples of the transformation of "read only" (Ofoto and Britannica Online) towards "read and write" software (Flickr and Wikipedia), while it also shows more general communicative changes. This for example includes the change from "taxonomies" towards "folksonomies". Folksonomies describe user classification through tagging in services like Flickr and most noticeably Delicious (also see *8.8*). These are, like Wikipedia, examples of user generated knowledge. Accordingly, to make sense of the Internet is very much in the hands of the users, as traditional institutions do not exist on the Internet, but on the Internet including YouTube institutions are rather decentralised and peripheral (cf. Finnemann 2005b). This has often been referred to as the democratisation and empowerment of the user in the public space, as proposed by Yochai Benkler (2006) and Henry Jenkins (2006).

This also brings us to the second feature of Web 2.0 as a revised business model, as O'Reilly states in his updated definition of Web 2.0 in 2006:

> Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the Internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. (Cf. O'Reilly 2006)

O'Reilly describes the change from being tied to hardware to using the web as a platform, where software applications are integrated into the web rather than on individual computers. YouTube is an example of this, where users do not need to download the content or the streaming software. YouTube provides everything on its platform, hence also the characterisation of YouTube as a media platform. With the emergence of the platform structure, ordinary users are also increasingly permitted to contribute to the content, where users generate value, as stated by O'Reilly and Battelle: "customers are building your business for you" (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0).

These two features of Web 2.0 are associated with a discrepancy, since social media is based on an ideology of user-empowerment and the development of new business models are of course striving towards commercial utilisation of social media. Hence, this has also lead to various critical discussions and questions on the negative consequences of especially user-empowerment and UGC (cf. Keen 2007).

7.5 YouTube affordances

Even though it has been argued that it is beneficial not to consider television and YouTube as two polarised modes of producing audiovisual content, there are, however, certain distinctions in terms of distribution and consumption that distinguish YouTube from television and that can be described usefully in regards to the characteristics of social media.

Drawing on different theories and media studies, I will turn attention towards some overall tendencies that are more specifically related to YouTube and relevant for understanding what takes place on the site, which is also somewhat on the periphery of some of the distinctions mentioned before between Web 1.0 and Web. 2.0. Besides these, there are other tendencies that can help explain what distinguishes YouTube in terms of functionality and affordances. These include the degree of:

- *Accessibility*: This aspect is touched upon by Meyrowitz (1985), who uses it as key feature when discussing the social organisation and role playing on electronic media; and in regards to what is being investigated in this project, the aspect of accessibility seems highly relevant, and will be elaborated on below.

- *Creator control*: Traditional cultural institutions include several agents that leave little control for what is ultimately published in the hands of the people that participate. On YouTube there is not an overall regulating authority or any producers who control or exploit participants. The only aspect that implicitly dictates certain social behaviour is the underlying demands and awareness of the audience. But in most cases, YouTubers are themselves in control of how and when they publish themselves. This also influences the content that tends to be more selectively in favour of the creator, where we at least within the most popular content can find many examples of idealised selves, as I will return to later in the analysis (cf. *11.1*).

- *Navigation*: One of the principal characteristics of YouTube is also the mode of navigation. This aspect has been investigated in the article *Categorising YouTube*, where it is argued that navigation on YouTube also takes place in terms of logics beyond conventional modes of categorisation, e.g., via links, tags and folksonomies. These are, however, ultimately influenced by the logics of YouTube's interface and the organisation of YouTube following the hierarchical algorithms of Google, which I shall also return to later in *8.8*.

- *User-involvement*: Media change social communication and involvement. This is shown in the new forms of user-involvement that take place on the site and in the modes of consumption that take place on various platforms. On YouTube, people can create online and mediated versions of themselves in multiple ways, through which they are increasingly gaining control of themselves, see *7.5.2*.

- *New temporal and spatial arrangements*: As already argued with Innis' bias of time and space, new forms of media change the structure and arrangements of time and space. This is also related to the increased control of the user as argued above. Since already discussed in section *6.2*, I will not go further into this tendency here.

- *Participatory Culture*. This last aspect is not a concrete feature, but a theoretical approach that describes YouTube as a representative of how users alter and contribute to the content as well as the production value of YouTube. This aspect is discussed in a more overall manner in the next chapter (*8.3*) and will therefore not be addressed here.

7.5.1 Accessibility to information on YouTube

I will in the following discus aspects that enable us to identify YouTube as a media platform. One constant issue that Meyrowitz also uses to distinguish electronic media from oral or print dominated media is the organisation of accessibility to information or what he refers to as the "patterns of information access" (1985, p. 36). Meyrowitz states that:

> (…) the high degree of accessibility to information through electronic media has lead to demands that all information – whatever its source or form – be accessible to the average person (1985, p. 166).

Although written with a focus on electronic media, it is analogous to how accessibility is frequently being addressed regarding the Internet. Arguably, accessibility to information has increased significantly with the emergence of the Internet and is also an essential part of YouTube's acclaimed success.

YouTube is an explicit demonstration of accessibility, where users without being registered members have free access to almost all videos and music. In the era of electronic media, cultural institutions decided what, when and who could access information. This is still the case in some countries where people are not allowed access to the Internet; but in general, most Western Internet users have access to almost all music on demand, where a site like The Pirate Bay has become a mainstream access point. Owners of audiovisual content seem to have surrendered in terms of claiming individual copyrights, and similar to the music industry, they appear to have accepted that sites such as YouTube and Netflix can no longer be ignored. Extensive collective copyright agreements have therefore been made, allowing users to access audiovisual content for free (e.g., YouTube and Vimeo) or for a very reduced prices (e.g., iTunes and Netflix).

Accessibility can perhaps also contribute to understanding YouTube's widespread success. YouTube is an open space of video streaming that everybody with an Internet connection can gain access to within seconds. Without any registration it is possible to watch videos immediately. YouTube was originally built on the Flash-format (FLV) that requires no pre-installed software. The Flash player is embedded on the site and provides immediate access, as an illustration of a Web 2.0 platform metaphor (cf. *7.3*), which arguably has contributed to making YouTube one of the most accessible as well as the world's largest video sharing site. The increased accessibility on YouTube furthermore has resulted in a redefinition of distribution that no longer is consumed in the context of cultural institutions, but has been replaced by a publicity culture based on ordinary people's abilities to present and be visible, juxtaposed with traditional institutions and expert systems. What we are experiencing and what YouTube demonstrates is therefore that accessibility is breaking the boundaries of different separated informational worlds; that which was before limited to early adopters or elite groups can now be considered a boundless space of unlimited information and access. Meyrowitz argues that:

> *the more situations and participants overlap, the less social differentiation in status and behaviour (…) media that blur access to social situations will foster less distinct roles* (1994, p. 54) [Italics in original].

As already argued, this very much seems to be the case where traditional agents of media content are adjusting to the form and content of UGC on YouTube, for example demonstrated by the emergence of virals and how social media beyond YouTube is increasingly being applied by television channels as well as politicians. Accessibility in regards to Innis' bias of space also allows voices to be heard that were otherwise silent, such as citizen journalism, twitter and blogging revolutions as well as *Wikileaks*. The case of *Wikileaks*, furthermore, illustrates how the individual has obtained more control through accessibility.

7.5.2 User-involvement

User-involvement is fundamental to the characteristics of YouTube that provide a range of different modes of user-involvement. YouTube enables direct user-involvement with the videos, where users can write comments regarding the video. It is a feature that is significantly different from television, where communication traditionally has been one-way communication, although television has also changed now accordingly with the emergence of the Internet. User-involvement also defines the popularity of and what type of content is most visible, since YouTube videos are hierarchically organised in terms of quantitative user-involvement.

On YouTube, involvement has also emerged as mode of communication through audiovisuality. Videos embed user responses and comments, while users themselves can also create video responses. Video responding is an audiovisual answer or comment to a specific video, which replaces the textual comment as well as the email. The video response enables a direct simulation of face-to-face communication between creator and respondent separated by time and space. This feature can be juxtaposed with *Skype*'s video-call tool and Apple's video chat software, *Facetime*, although these are not separated in time. Therefore, the communication that takes place on YouTube through video responding is always in relation to the content, since contact between the participants is per se asynchronous. Nonetheless, these features underline a further step towards establishing a more authentic simulation of face-to-face communication independent and detached from space and mobility, in contrast to telephones and static desktops, where content functions as a shared point of reference, and furthermore that YouTube can also provide a sense of belongingness for its users.

7.6 YouTube and other social media sites

While these aspects or affordances may also include other social network sites, to juxtapose YouTube with all of these would nonetheless be somewhat misleading. YouTube differs from social networks sites (SNS), like Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Friendstar and MySpace in terms of:

A) The purpose of YouTube is not explicitly concerned with socialisation, but the overall purpose is rather to generate online video streaming.

B) Viewers do not need to create a profile, since on YouTube it is possible to watch videos and save videos by saving http addresses without making oneself known. Variable modes of access make it more difficult to maintain a homogenous social network in a community where a large number of people remain undisclosed, while a second group are visible to various degrees in terms of their status as registered users. This makes participation more nuanced than on other sites, where user-involvement is an obligation.

C) The friends you have or the people you subscribe to are not necessarily people you know in real life, but remain online characters. Unlike Facebook, where a majority of your "friends" are people you at least on one occasion have experienced a face-to-face meeting with, although some tend to be friends with, e.g., politicians in order to signal political or cultural affiliation. On YouTube, most family members and friends of the creator are likely to watch the video, but a significantly larger number of viewers have not met the creator in person (although some videos can simulate this in terms of para-social interaction (cf. *11.3*).

D) The content on YouTube is not entirely produced by ordinary users, but also by semi-professional and professional media producers, unlike Friendstar, Google+ and Facebook, although (in a different way than on YouTube) many institutions and corporate companies have an official Facebook site.

E) Unlike other social media platforms, YouTube has created different social classes within its community in terms of YouTuber partner status and visibility. (On Facebook, social status is of course recognised in terms of the number of friends, but this has just as much to do with off-line social status.)

This list indicates that YouTube is a somewhat different example of Web 2.0 than, e.g., Facebook, especially in terms of user-interaction. Facebook and YouTube are, however, embedded in one another, where many people integrate YouTube links to their profile and in this way use Facebook to share and communicate around the content, just as YouTube allows users to link their videos directly to Facebook. YouTube, however, as of December 2011, has made a new design, where buttons that link directly from YouTube channels to, e.g., Facebook or Twitter are embedded.

7.7 The multi-functionality of YouTube

The complexity of YouTube can be illustrated by the fact that YouTube has several functions of communication and compilations of information that influence the content you will find and thereby also depend on from which point one is accessing YouTube.

YouTube as an online streaming platform

YouTube is first and foremost an online streaming platform, where content is consumed and distributed, with some similarities to traditional television channels. This is obvious when one looks at the many music videos that can be found within the popular content of the site and with Sony and Samsung, who have enabled YouTube functions in their TVs; it seems natural to associate YouTube with traditional television. This is also underlined in the way YouTube simulates many of the components of television, for example in their presentation of categorical channels based on themes that can also be found on television, e.g., sports, news, entertainment, comedy and film. But the difference is that even though the principle of linking to videos can be juxtaposed with zapping through channels, YouTube provides a VOD structure that automatically links you to similar content sorted by tags and popularity. There are also many examples of how broadcast companies brand themselves by establishing a television channel on YouTube, thus harvesting the grass roots DIY ideology that YouTube is frequently associated with (cf. Burgess and Green 2009, Strangelove 2010). And there are furthermore many examples of how major broadcasters expand their content on YouTube as a form of television on demand (also see McDonald 2009, p. 395). Within UGC we see a tendency for the audience to be encouraged to subscribe so they will receive an email every time a new video is uploaded to the specific channel. This is an example of how YouTube, working as a broadcast platform, uses its specific affordances to present a more personalised broadcast form. This is a method that most YouTube Partner videos have obtained through direct tags and links for encouraging audiences to subscribe.

YouTube as a media archive

At the same time, YouTube functions in a different way for people who are looking for a specific video. Here, YouTube acts as a media archive, as it is, e.g., being used to find old film clips that are relevant in combination with, for instance, teaching, where didactic how-to videos can help you bake a cake or build a rocket. This function of YouTube primarily takes place through specific searches, where users have a clear idea of what they are looking for. Another way of finding content within this functionality of YouTube is exterior linking from news sites and especially Facebook. This also makes YouTube a distributor of cultural taste; when people link to a specific video, it often signals a specific

taste for music or something extraordinary that involves a cool or particularly funny or shocking video. This positions the distributor of the video on, e.g., Facebook with a specific unique cultural value that in most cases is acknowledged by her or his friends on Facebook. By linking a video to a Facebook profile, it is not solely a demonstration of cultural taste; it is also fundamentally a function of "sociability" as proposed by Tove A. Rasmussen et al. (2009). Another function of sociability in regards to YouTube as a media archive is the specific use of YouTube to tell anecdotes in face-to-face situations. For example, when a group of people are gathered at a party or at a social happening, instead of telling stories and anecdotes to one another, they show their favourite videos on YouTube, using the videos to share each other's company. This aspect is also related to a third function of YouTube: social networking.

YouTube as a social network

YouTube attracts users to interact and strengthen social bonds with other users, through comments, channels as well as through video responding (cf. *7.5.2*). There are many examples of co-producing and co-creativity, especially in regards to the so-called YouTube Mashups (cf. *The Mashups of YouTube*). But on a large scale, socialisation in terms of user-participation can primarily be found within smaller and closed communities, where people to a larger extent communicate through their videos. For videos with 300,000 views, the close and personal interaction among users (where creators directly respond to concrete viewers or communicate with specific people they address in person in the videos) is different, as will also be argued in regards to Patricia Lange in the methodology chapter. However, mediated interpersonal communication does take place among the most popular UGC as well, where para-social communication and mediated intimacy can be found in several examples, where especially the collective feeling of being part of a shared YouTube community seems of much importance, as I will also illustrate in the analyses in chapter 11.

YouTube as an information database

A final functionality, which includes all three previous functions, is the usage of demographic data that registered YouTube users automatically provide the YouTube organisation with. This information has great value for its investors and advertisers, in whom Google Inc. has economic interest. This also draws attention to YouTube as a commercial platform. Geert Lovink has presented this function of YouTube as a database, arguing that "we no longer watch films or TV, we watch databases" (2008, p. 9). The point is that the content of YouTube and the navigation through content follow the logic of YouTube's interface, which organises videos through meta-data, i.e., links and tags. This accentuates the importance of meta-data as the principle mode of navigating through content, as well as drawing attention to the importance of the traffic generated regarding the video.

7.7.1 What function of YouTube is being studied here?

With this multi-functional understanding, it is evident that it is not possible to conduct an investigation of YouTube that addresses all the functions of the site equally. While aspects of YouTube as a media archive and as a social network will be referred to throughout, the main focus will be on how YouTube functions both as a database and as a streaming platform for UGC, where a great deal of content is part of a series that is followed by regular viewers, similar to a television show, but it also includes viewers who interact with the content via, e.g., comment writing. As discussed in *2.4*, this choice is partly dictated by the choice of methodology, where a more detailed focus on how YouTube functions as a social network and media archive would most likely have added interesting dimensions to the project, but on the other hand it has proven necessary to restrict the analytical focus point. The understanding of YouTube as intertwined with television consumption and content furthermore echoes how YouTube must be understood in the context of the digital television culture.

7.8 Summing up

This chapter to a certain degree has applied the expanded framework of medium theory, as proposed in *6.10*, to also involve contextual aspects of YouTube as a media platform. This includes a macro-scale perspective on how YouTube content is consumed as well as its producing agency, where the involvement of reports aimed to situate YouTube in juxtaposition with television, echoing the principles of remediation. It has moreover been discussed how we can regard YouTube as an exponent of social media or "Web 2.0" and how YouTube is distinctive from other examples of social network sites (SNS) like Facebook. Some of the most discussed and often associated aspects or affordances of social media were also discussed in regards to YouTube, as well as a reflection on how we can further conceptualise YouTube within its different consumptive functions and affordances for its users.

After providing this overall description of YouTube as a media platform and how certain affordances have an impact on the site and its content, I will address another overall communicative framework in regards to cultural studies. To investigate this perspective of YouTube in the context of contemporary cultural studies may also serve to elaborate and discuss YouTube as a media platform despite that cultural studies is fundamentally concerned with reception and cultural ideology. A discussion of YouTube in the context of cultural studies can nonetheless provide this study with the opportunity to involve an institutional focus of YouTube as well as focus on user-agency, where the aspect of participatory culture also will be elaborated. Finally, another argument for outlining a framework of cultural studies is the underlying focus on everyday culture.

8 - The heritage of Cultural Studies

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was the starting point for the now worldwide study approach that most researchers refer to as Cultural Studies. CCCS or the "Birmingham School" was founded by Richard Hoggart in 1964, but its two most significant voices, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, became the principle spokespersons of cultural studies. The tradition of cultural studies first and foremost has had a strong impact on audience research and a shift away from the traditional two-step approach in media-effect research. A central methodological turning point is Stuart Hall's *Encoding-Decoding* model (1973), which this dissertation, however, does not adopt. The reflection on cultural studies is here relevant due to the tradition's focus on culture as social praxis that furthermore signals a movement from a predominant focus on elitist art towards popular culture. As famously stated by Williams: "Culture is ordinary, in every society in every mind" (2001/1958, p.11).

Although written in 1958, Williams' focus on the ordinary and culture as an experience of everyday life echoes contemporary elements of cultural studies, including the concept of "vernacular creativity" as coined by Jean Burgess (2007), describing ordinary people's creative experience with culture in the everyday life. In the same context, John Fiske also emphasises the ordinary and considers popularity as central to cultural studies as the actual popular culture being consumed and experienced by ordinary people: "Popularity is here a measure of a cultural form's ability to serve the desires of its customers" (1987, p. 310).

This distance to a cultural canon and the existing focus on elitist art was a thematic starting point for cultural studies that developed a public conscious throughout popular culture, mirroring the shared fundament to Marxism's interest in the life and culture of the working classes, also related to an understanding of popular culture as commodities.

8.1 YouTube as a popular culture

It is difficult *not* to discuss YouTube in a context of popular culture, and especially when looking at the most promoted and popular content of the site. Previous studies of YouTube have also been conducted in relation to cultural studies, including Lange (2007) and Burgess and Green (2009).

Although what on YouTube is considered popular culture for a majority of people is somewhat different from mainstream mass popular culture, but it does not involve what in regards to cultural studies would be characterised as subculture (e.g., Hebdige 1979). YouTube has its own mainstream culture that is occasional referred to as the "YouTube community". There is clearly no definition of the YouTube community or its limits, but it entails its own celebrities and has moreover adopted certain social norms and modes of communication, which distinguishes the site from other online content streaming platforms (cf. Strangelove 2010, p. 121). As I will return to later, the YouTube community is an essential phenomenon on YouTube that provides both creators and active viewers with a group identity that evokes a sense of shared belongingness. It is also a community where the celebrities of YouTube for most people older than 30 are completely unknown territory. So when we are talking about popular culture, in regards to the content referred to here, it is relativised to the popular culture of YouTube. This is despite the fact that YouTube as a media platform is widely regarded as a mass-media platform that television channels, radio programmes, newspapers and other websites frequently refer to, but these references are almost entirely about people and events that exist beyond and outside the perimeters of YouTube.

8.2 A connection to symbolic interactionism

Another key issue of cultural studies is the focus on mass media as a communicator of dominating ideologies, and according to Hall, it is also a communicator of hegemony, which has its theoretical starting point in (Neo) Marxism, i.e., Antonio Gramsci's concept of "cultural hegemony" (e.g., Hall 1992/1973). YouTube, in terms of distribution and institutional lack of regulation, does appear fundamentally different from the contexts that theorists of cultural studies exemplify their cultural hegemony with.

The ideological perspective is also expressed in the methodology of cultural studies. The approach developed an emphasis on reception of popular culture. The result of this was a concrete model of understanding the creation of meaning between agents of media products and their consumers. The most well known example is Hall's *Encoding/Decoding* model (1992/1973), tested by David Morley in *The Nationwide Audience* (1980). One of Hall's principal arguments was that texts are overtly polysemic, i.e., the encoded ideological message is not necessarily perceived intentionally, but could result in what Hall refers to as negotiated and oppositional readings. This aspect of cultural studies is therefore also founded in a hermeneutic perspective, where meaning is created in the interacting process with the text. Tove A. Rasmussen et al. (2009) have applied Paul Ricouer's (1984) three positions of the reader to argue how meaning is created in and around UGC, analogous to the principle of the "hermeneutic circle". This approach is somewhat similar to Hall's three readings and it can usefully be applied to understand how meaning and identity are generated in the interaction between creators, content and users, which I shall also reflect upon in the analysis.

Hall's model has a clear interest in the "decoding" phase and the point that there is not necessarily correspondence between the encoding and decoding processes, and reception thus becomes polysemic. Another principle stance of cultural studies is thereby also implied in the view of the audience as not solely passive consumers and "victims" of indoctrination. This inherent ideology and political context of cultural studies has developed in many directions including the noticeable American and Australian interpretations of cultural studies and therein the contemporary discussion of "Participatory Culture", which I shall return to in the following section.

The fascination with everyday life also bridges the focus of cultural studies to a wider perspective on identity formation that emerges through the interaction with media. This links Hall's polysemic reader position and the American interpretation of cultural studies, for example of Henry Jenkins, with micro-sociology, represented among others by Erving Goffman (1990/1959), and with the concept of "symbolic interactionism" as coined by George Herbert Mead (1937). In that sense, the interest in meaning and social interaction is shared by this particular part of cultural studies and in the revised version of medium theory applied by Meyrowitz. Although Meyrowitz has a different approach in terms of his emphasis on media structures and environments, there is a connection between cultural studies and the media sociological perspective of medium theory represented by Meyrowitz centred on symbolic interactionism, which I will pick up on at the end of this chapter. Briefly, it is an approach which this dissertation also adopts in regards to analysing and comprehending social behaviour within the content of YouTube as investigated in the article *The Performative way of YouTube*, which focuses on identity formation in the context of "impression management". That is, the different ways of presenting an image of the self (cf. Goffman 1959, p. 203).

Before going further into the aspect of the participatory culture, I will refer to how cultural studies also has ties with post-structuralism that for instance involve Judith Butler's constructivist understanding of identity and gender. Her approach is elaborated in regards to performativity (cf. *The Performative Way of*

YouTube) and can also be related to Hall's understanding of identity formation (cf. 1996, 1997), also see *8.10*.

8.3 Participatory Culture and User Generated Content

What also links this dissertation to the traditions of cultural studies is the focus digital media have on agency in terms of user-participation and user generated content (UGC), which have grown out of the theories of Hall and perhaps especially John Fiske, who has paid a lot of attention to the positive impact of increased user-involvement, resulting in a "cultural economy", where users are active and capable of creating new meaning:

> The move to the cultural economy involves yet another role-shift from commodity to producer. As the earlier role-shift changed the role of the program from commodity to producer, so the move to the cultural economy involves the audience in a role-shift which changes it also from a commodity to a producer: in this case producer of meanings and pleasures (*Television Culture*, 1987, p. 312).

The theoretical framework for the aforementioned participatory culture turn thus has its starting point in cultural studies in terms of its approach towards the audience as active and co-creators of meaning. The relationship between producer and consumer was, in Fiske's understanding, still considered separated from the text. But Fiske's emphasis on the audience as an active producer of meaning has been re-emphasised, advocating in the focus on user-empowerment, which characterises the recent cultural studies approach towards user-participation in social media. Alvin Toffler describes in his book *The Third Wave* (1981) the fusing of the producer and consumer into the "prosumer". He describes the consumer's possibility for giving feedback and customising products, but not to change or participate with content as described by the participatory culture approach, since corporations basically control the prosumer (cf. 1981).

With the emergence of the Internet and an increasing focus on user-interaction, new terms such and "produsers" (cf. Bruns 2008) and "participatory culture" (Jenkins 2006) have emerged and have turned the focus towards the audience as active creators of content, which thereby also goes further than Fiske, who only saw the audience as producers of meaning and as "prosumers". Most significant is Henry Jenkins' presentation of amateur fans as exponents for user empowerment in *Textual Poachers* (1992). In his ethnographic investigation of media fandom, he focuses on the interaction between fans and popular culture. Jenkins describes fans as empowered users and they exemplify how user-interaction contributes to a democratisation process:

> Fandom originates (…) as a response to the relative powerlessness of the consumer in relation to the powerful institutions (…) Fandom possesses particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions and practices (…) Fandom generates systems of distribution that reject profit and broaden access to its creative works (1992, pp. 278-280).

Jenkins extends this approach in *Convergence Culture* (2006), where for instance fans are no longer members of a subculture, but are contributors and active participants in a mainstream culture that emphasises the users as the overall main source for innovation and creativity, and accordingly are increasingly taken seriously by established media producers:

> In the late 1980s and early 1990s, cultural scholars, myself included, depicted media fandom as important test sites for ideas about active consumption and grassroots creativity (…) operating in the shadows of, in response to, as well as an alternative to commercial culture. Across the past decade, the web has brought these consumers from the margins of the media industry into the spotlight (2006, p. 246).

What has embraced ordinary users (including fans) is first and foremost what Jenkins sees as a cultural shift or a cultural convergence, which rather than being a paradigm shift between earlier media forms and digital media, it "assumes that old and new media will interact in even more complex ways" (ibid., 6). Although this may sound like an approach that would fall under medium theory, Jenkins makes it clear that the convergence culture is less dependent on technological processes, than on "consumers' active participation"(ibid., p. 3) and is in that sense arguing in accordance with cultural studies. Jenkins depicts the consumers as active, creative and more innovative than earlier media's more passive consumers, in which his overall point is the acknowledgement of a culture based on emerging user-empowerment (cf. ibid., p.19). Jenkins' acknowledgment of users as more active is furthermore clearly echoed in Tapscott's celebration of the "Net Gen" (cf. *7.3*). Social networks allow users and consumers to interact, rate and subscribe. The social networks are thus creating a possibility for a much more explicit critical stance towards dominating media cultures and users are thereby also in control: "Participation is more open-ended, less under the control of media producers and more under the control of media consumers" (Jenkins ibid, p. 133).

Simultaneously, participation allows consumers to create a much stronger, intimate and creative relationship towards other participating consumers as well as the media product. On YouTube, it is noticeable how consumers of audiovisual content participate through commenting, rating, subscribing as well as video responding. We have also seen how many "passive" consumers have turned into "active" creators of UGC, for instance through video responding. YouTube is in that sense a suitable example of Jenkins' description of the convergence culture. A final aspect that is also visible on YouTube is Jenkins' emphasis on the social interaction and user collaboration. Within convergence culture, the consumer is no longer an individual, but part of a collective process, using Pierre Lévy's term "Collective Intelligence" (ibid., 4), which also changes media consumption from being consumed by isolated individuals to being "socially connected" (ibid., 19). This also seems to be the ideological understanding of YouTube as a social network, a community of YouTubers, where we can consider the many Spoofs, Mashups and Remix as concrete examples of "collective intelligence" or what Axel Bruns refers to as "co-creativity" (2008) in regards to his term "produsage" (see below, and see also *The Mashups of YouTube*).

Finally, Jenkins acknowledges that the convergence culture is not entirely existing of empowered consumers, it is rather a coexistence between commercial enterprises and grassroots user cultures: "Convergence, as we can see, is both a top-down corporate driven process and a bottom-up consumer driven process. Corporate convergence co-exists with grassroots convergence" (ibid., p 19). However, the creativity and innovation are entirely based on the empowered mind of the consumer, while the commercial industries in most cases benefit from this grassroots creativity.

Burgess and Green in their investigation of YouTube have also adapted Jenkins' description of the convergence culture, in which they situate YouTube and identify participation as the principal characteristic of the site:

> YouTube has a place within the long history of and uncertain future of media change, the politics of cultural participation, and the growth of knowledge. Clearly, it is both as symptom of, and an actor in, economic and cultural transition that are tied up somehow in digital technologies (…) and more directly participation of consumers (2009, p. 14).

Participation according to Burgess and Green is fundamental to YouTube, and it does not just include creators and interactive users, but everybody who watches content on the site: [Cultural participation] "(…) requires us to understand all those who upload, views, comment on, or create content for YouTube (…) as *participants*" ibid., p. 57) [Italics in original]. Viewers are regarded as participants

because they "leave traces" (ibid.). This is, however, in principal no different from buying a newspaper, turning on the radio or changing the channel of the television, which in that case must also be considered participation.

As both Jenkins and Burgess and Green's description of users also indicate, there are very few critical voices towards the emergence of the participatory culture. Admittedly, Jenkins refers to a "participation gap" that beyond technological limitation (the digital divide) is also a differentiation between different groups of participation based on different inequalities such as race and literacy (2006, p. 258). Jenkins also states in the beginning of the volume that the examples he analyses are based primarily on "early adopters" or "elite consumers" (ibid., p. 23). Hence the creative producers of content are not representative of the entire population of the Internet, which is also addressed as a critical aspect by Jean Burgess (2007).

These admissions, however, do not overshadow the overall celebration and general depiction of the consumer as a more democratic, social and active consumer in terms of the convergence culture. The uncritical picture of the user is also noticeable in Axel Bruns' *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond* (2008). He advocates a transformation of the viewer from a passive to active and far more cognitive operative users. Bruns describes the transformation as the emergence of "produsage":

> [Produsage] highlights that within the communities which engages in collaborative creation and extension of information and knowledge (…) the distinctions between producers and users of content have faded into comparative insignificance. In many of the spaces we encounter here, users are always already necessarily also producers of the shared knowledge base, regardless of whether they are aware of this role – they have become a new, hybrid, *produser* (2008, p. 2) [Italics in original].

Based on the principle of collective intelligence, Bruns intends to demonstrate a transformation of industrial modes of production towards collaborative, user-led content creation. He illustrates this by different analyses of social media, such as Wikipedia and Flickr and briefly YouTube. Bruns argues that consumption has become much more dynamic, and he sees it as a redefinition of popular culture distributed as traditional commodities, where content as cultural products no longer has any clear endpoints, but is characterised by co-creativity. Hence, cultural production becomes an on-going creative process illustrated by the emergence of citizen journalism and Wikipedia (ibid., p. 34), but as also argued in *The Mashups of YouTube*, this perspective is more complex on YouTube.

8.4 YouTube participation

YouTube is frequently being associated with participation and user-empowerment, but the unconditional celebration of all users as active participants, however, is in need of modification, at least in regards to YouTube.

First, to juxtapose users and producers on YouTube is an incomplete picture of what takes place within the site, and how content is being distributed. Other researchers have referred to the so-called "90-9-1-rule" quoting a *Guardian* article: "if you get a group of 100 people online then one will create content, 10 will "inter-act" with it (commenting or offering improvements) and the other 89 will just view it" (van Dijck 2009, p. 44) (Also see Snickars and Vonderau 2009, p. 12). The *Guardian* article, however, refers to an undefined rule of thumb without any empirical evidence to back it up and therefore can not be regarded as anything other than an opinion, but it nonetheless becomes a relevant encouragement to take a critical investigative look at the participant term. If we take a quick look at the most discussed videos on YouTube, user-interaction in terms of comment writing and rating (like/dislike) accounts in most cases for less than 5% of the amount of generated views, while user creations via video responding for less than 0.1%. It has to be acknowledged that in some videos that

embed competitions, the number of comments is higher than the number of views, since users increase their chance of winning when writing more than one comment. Videos with high numbers of comments due to a competition, however, give a misleading indication of the proportion of interaction, since almost all of the comments in these videos write the sentence: "Enter me" as a standard comment when participating in competitions. In most cases with regular comments, the YouTube content seems to follow the "90-9-1 rule" or includes significantly less user-interaction. David Buckingham also supports this argument, when stressing: "The extent of active participation, for example in user-generated sites, is vastly less than is often assumed" (2009, p. 44).

From a similar point of view, Matthew Hindman conducted an empirical investigation of citizen journalism and blogging. His research exhibited a reason to downplay the role of users' engagement with politics through blogging that, according to Hindman, instead is dominated by elitist and only a few individuals rather than the collective and collaborative (cf. *The Myth of Digital Democracy* 2009). This is of course an investigation that cannot be used for any conclusive arguments in regards to YouTube, but it accentuates the reasons to distinguish between different types of participation on YouTube. Patricia Lange in another context has argued for a distinction between various levels of user engagement. Burgess and Green quote Lange in an unpublished paper, where she proposes five different types of participants: 1) former participants, 2) casual users; 3) active participants; 4) YouTubers and 5) YouTube celebrities (see Burgess and Green 2009b, p. 93).

Although, these types address some aspects of the differentiation of users I outline here, I instead consider three overall types of participants, which correspond to the aforementioned "90-9-1 rule", since this enables an overall distinction between participants and non-participants (through comment writing, subscription or video responding). This includes:

1) *Regular or casual users*. This group involves users who primarily stream content similar to consuming television through "zapping", although YouTube is based on a VOD and linking structure that makes the actual act of viewing somewhat different, but not necessarily more active or cognitively operative.
2) *Commenting and engaging users*. This includes the users who are registered as users on YouTube and who write comments and engage with the content through subscriptions.
3) *Creating users*. These users are engaged on YouTube with creating and uploading audiovisual content.

Users can of course be engaged in all three types of participation, but a distinction between three types of users suggests that some users are participants in a more active way than others. It also advocates a modification, as previously referred to, when YouTube functions as a regular streaming platform (in *7.7*), where watching YouTube videos without commenting or any other form of interaction is basically analogous to watching television, "zapping" through channels, which is somewhat different from the usage of YouTube as a social network, where users participate through comment writing and video responding. An overall argument for distinguishing between levels of participation is that on YouTube a lot of the meaning is generated around the content, where for example, it is necessary to be involved in comment reading or linking to the creator's channel in order to understand the video. This creates different meaning to the video depending on the level of participation. Another overall difference is the various roles and status users are adopting according to their different levels of participation influenced by contextual aspects, such as how YouTube organises the content and the impact of economic interests. Arguably, creators and casual users can therefore not be juxtaposed and undifferentiatedly embraced in, e.g., Bruns' "produser" term as identical contributors to the creativity and content on YouTube. Participation on YouTube proves to be more complex than suggested with the "produser"

term, as it can be argued it involves at least three different levels of user-engagement. There are moreover other influential factors that have an impact on YouTube agency, as underlined by Jose van Dijck, who also considers the produser term too one-dimensional:

> (…) user agency is a lot more complex than these bipolar terms suggest; we need to account for the multifarious roles of users in a media environment where the boundaries between commerce, content and information are currently being redrawn (2009, p. 42).

Following this, I shall consider YouTube agency from the different perspectives. In relationship to this dissertation, the impact of YouTube's interface and certain affordances will also be addressed in *8.8*. By observing the content and the comments, it is possible to investigate the second (*Commenting and engaging users)* and third types of user agency (*Creating users*), while users who watch content without involvement will in this present project only be observed as counted views. In the following, the focus will primarily be on the creating users.

8.5 YouTube partners – a new generation of creators

Previously, ordinary users on YouTube were referred to as amateurs. The term amateur has been almost synonymous with social media and Web 2.0. Amateurs create UGC that can simplistically be characterised as a distinction between "amateurs" and "professionals". This distinction draws the line between users that receive payment for producing videos or gaining no financial payment for creating content as also stated by David Buckingham: "an amateur receives no financial payment for their participation in an activity, while a professional does" (2009, p. 32). This relationship for the last couple of years has become more and more blurred.

YouTube is increasingly being inhabited by users who are being paid for producing audiovisual content. They have gained visibility and popularity, which let them create content as a profession. This development demands a further distinction between ordinary YouTubers and what is being referred to as "YouTube Partners". The status of being a partner ranges in terms of the amount of subscribers and views, which means there are many different levels of UGC partners on YouTube. There are also established creators such as record companies, TV channels, politicians and pop-stars, but if focusing only on the creators of UGC, YouTube reveals an increasing gap between the so-called celebrities or what I refer to as YouTube partners and non-partners. With more than 20,000 partners, the YouTube partners are no longer a marginalised group on YouTube. YouTube introduced their partner programme in 2007 and in 2009 they included individual YouTubers (meaning the ordinary users). The status as a YouTube Partner has since then become a somewhat common profession that many creators have obtained and is clearly recognisable in this sample, which is dominated by YouTube partners, (cf. *3.9*). It is therefore necessary to make a further distinction between ordinary creators of UGC and creators who produce UGC as a profession and thereby also are more dependent on an audience.

Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller describe agency in regards to digital media as an accelerating blurring concept where amateurs are no longer just amateurs, but so-called "Pro-Ams" (2004), which thus bridges the understanding of professional and amateur producers. They define the Pro-Am as a "new social hybrid. Their activities are not adequately captured by the traditional definitions of work and leisure, professional and amateur, consumption and production" (2004, p. 20). On YouTube, this hybrid exists in the vacillation of amateur and professional modes of video production. Many YouTubers can be characterised as Pro-Ams when they produce content as amateurs but following the standards of professional producers. Producing content is a leisure activity that depicts the playfulness of YouTube, where people for the fun of it display their communicative or creative skills and in that way, as Leadbeater and Miller state: "Pro-Ams create a sense of identity for themselves through

consumption". This takes place on YouTube for instance through the participation of social networking and promoting oneself as a hobby. But at the same time, YouTube Partners have become more than just Pro-Ams producing content for the fun of it. However, paradoxically the task is nevertheless to present it as being fun. By creating cultural capital, as Leadbeater and Miller argue, which people build up around their leisure activities, the YouTube Partner status is a recognition of an identity, and by creating creative capital, we witness an accentuating professionalisation process of the Pro-Ams. The amateurs have turned their leisure and playful activities into a profession, getting paid for producing content and having fun. They are regarded in terms of YouTube standards as fully professional on YouTube since they are the only one's producing the specific form of content that very much is linked to their personality and social skills. Their mediated self that is presented online has become a commodity with economic value. Now of course not all YouTube partners are paid the same and the partner programme includes many different modes of hierarchal status (for example, only the 500 most popular partners are invited to the annual YouTube conference "Vidcon") and the distinction of when people are professionals or Pro-Ams must be placed in a variable range of many different aspects (for example age). *The Pro-Am Revolution* is written in the same positive tone, acknowledging the modern user as a participant regardless of actions. And according to Leadbeater and Miller, 58% of the UK population in 2004 did perform some type of Pro-Am activity (ibid., p. 30), and in that sense the term seems to include too many groups. This makes the term unsuitable for describing what takes place on YouTube, where a large range of Pro-Ams can be found, but far from 58% of its users produce content.

But what the Pro-Am term accurately focuses on is the fact that almost all UGC professional partners started out as Pro-Ams, where in many cases an identity was built around the person as an ordinary person; that measured by performance skills and the ability to entertain has been turned into cultural capital, where the fun and hedonistic aspects of the Pro-Am status are still integrated in the content as a signal of maintaining integrity. The YouTuber *Sxephil*, also known as *PhillipDeFranco* on his other channel, is a good example of this; he started out in his college room in 2006 and in 2011 has expenses of $25,000 a month to run his show with 10 employees (cf. Hudson 2011). Nonetheless, his show and Vlog look very much like they did in 2006, since as *PhillipDeFranco* states in a direct response to the article where this information was reported, "the main thing is maintaining 100% of your revenue" (from the video: *My YouTube Setup in Response to this Morning's BBC Article*).

With the emergence of YouTube Partners, we witness how the status and distribution of UGC divides the creators of UGC into two distinctive types of creators. One grows out of the "pro-Am" status and has obtained a new identity in terms of a full-time professional who no longer can be considered an example of a pro-am. The other group of YouTubers, which Leadbeater and Miller coin as Pro-Ams, create and share content both in a much smaller and more intimate scale, but also as a leisure activity including the social networks of YouTube. Of course this can also take place among YouTube Partners, but when adapting a profession of producing content for an audience, it inevitably contextualises many leisure activities with work, where content is uploaded at specific consistent times and socialising tools (tags encouraging user-involvement) are often used as promotion strategies.

Overall, the latter group of Pro-Ams who are not YouTube Partners mainly personify the ideology behind the participatory culture. But with the accentuating visibility of YouTube Partners, this group of ordinary creators is increasingly being marginalised in regards to visibility among the most popular content, hence widening the gap between participants with UGC as a profession and participants who are not getting paid.

Nevertheless, it is very difficult to detect any differences in the content, since what seems to provide the YouTube partners' videos with cultural value is very much the ability to maintain an impression of authenticity embedded in the raw amateur style and direct contact with the camera that is an inherent mode of expression in a great proportion of UGC, as well as already argued to maintain integrity with the YouTube community. Finally, this is also further underlined by the fact that the YouTube Partners are producers of content on YouTube and are not visible in the contemporary media culture beyond its perimeters, stressing the dependence on YouTube as a community and therefore also an acknowledgment of the styles and modes of communication of the site.

8.6 The optimistic turn in media research

In 1986, Neil Postman (within the framework of media ecology[18]) exhibited a pessimistic point of view regarding television:

> Television is our culture's principal mode of knowing about itself. Therefore – and this the critical point – how television stages the world becomes the model for how the world is properly to be staged (1986, p. 92).

From Postman's perspective, television's symbolic environment continues to exist even when the television is turned off, thus becoming a medium that dominates public life and especially in regards to children, who are being deprived of their childhood (ibid., p. 142 pp.). Even though, regarding television, history seems to have proven otherwise, a question similar to the ethical one that Postman raised regarding television's influence on children is, however, yet to be answered in terms of YouTube. In particular, increased access allows children to navigate unrestrained on YouTube, where the boundaries of privacy and public life seem to have been blurred and could easily result in misleading ideas of social behaviour in public life. Although touched upon by Michael Strangelove (2010, pp. 61-62), the overall arguments of participatory culture have a much more positive position, even though Andrew Keen, with his *The Cult of the Amateur* (2007), stands out as one of the most significant pessimists regarding amateur cultures and critics of participatory culture.

To state that creating content on YouTube is essentially concerned with self-promotion in a competitive environment seems in this context almost as blasphemy. When writing about and discussing YouTube in regards to UGC, there is as argued an outspoken acknowledgment and emphasis on the creative empowerment of users (e.g., Burgess and Green 2009, Tapscott 2010**,** Strangelove 2010, Gauntlett 2011). This celebration draws on the euphoria of users' positions and obtained influence in a media culture that beforehand had been dominated by media institutions that have taken commercial advantage of their viewers. The shift is apparent in the characterisation of participatory culture and the ideology behind Web 2.0. This is an ideology based on the democratic exaltation of the free, creative and non-suppressed individual. Many of these arguments, which also include Jenkins (2006), Bruns (2008) as well as Benkler (2006), are examples of the shift from the rather negative perspective on electronic media towards what Graeme Turner has referred to as a stance of "Digital Optimism" (cf. 2010, pp. 126.). According to Turner, this digital optimism is primarily articulated in a shift of focus towards user-empowerment:

> The traditional media studies' focus upon industries and institutions is displaced by a new media focus on the 'produsing' consumer, customized content and the individualized audience (ibid., p. 128).

[18] Media Ecology was coined by Postman (1970) and is almost identical with medium theory; it, however, distances itself from technological determinism, but as McLuhan also used the term media as environment in *Understanding Media* (1995) and Meyrowitz uses the environment as a metaphor in his medium theory approach (1985, p. 15), I have made no attempt of making a in-depth distinction between the two terms.

This shift is also a turn from the ideologically founded traditions of cultural studies' focus on hegemonic structured institutions towards an emphasis on decentralised and differentiated, user-generated bottom-up structures. But in contrast to the methodology of cultural studies, there is, according to Turner, little focus on empirical evidence as he considers the most fundamental critique of the digital optimists (ibid., p. 128).

The objective here is not to downplay the significant impact of ordinary users' increasing visibility in social media and Web 2.0, which is a fundamental factor for explaining what takes place in the consumption and distribution of videos on YouTube as argued earlier by Burgess and Green (2009) and more recently by David Gauntlett, who states that the commercialisation of UGC has its starting point in shared communities of YouTube: "the users who managed to become 'YouTube stars' have done so by embracing the community, and by acting as community members themselves" (2011, p. 93). The intention is rather to downplay the unified focus on the user-empowered elements of participatory culture as the most fitting description of what distinguishes YouTube from for example television. A site like YouTube provides doubtlessly more possibilities for user-engagement, but it does not mean people by their presence on the site use these affordances. David Buckingham also addresses this issue when in regards to fan media he writes:

> There is a distinct danger here of overestimating, and indeed merely celebrating, the power of media fans (…) contemporary media often depend upon 'activity' on the part of consumers, but that does not necessarily mean that consumers are more powerful: *activity* should not be confused by *agency* (2009, p. 43) [Italics in original].

Buckingham's point is that although users may per se be participants and thus agents of the participatory culture as argued earlier by Burgess and Green, it does not mean that being more active also leads to increased user-empowerment. For instance, by being more active, users also become more visible and thus more vulnerable as commercial targets. With the emergence of the YouTube partner status, we witness user-empowerment, but we also witness how the gap between ordinary users has been widened since UGC is now being consumed on YouTube in a commercial context, i.e., interfaces, affordances, organisational structures which marginalise ordinary users who are not partners and thus leave them less empowered. What we see on YouTube is a shift from its ideological starting point as a social community towards dominance of a commodity driven community. In the following I will elaborate on this shift and furthermore how it can be understood in relationship with the organisation of YouTube's affordances and interface and how this influences YouTube as a commercial distributor of audiovisual content, as also underlined by van Dijck, who in accordance with the aforementioned focus on affordances (cf. *6.9*) argues that:

> A more profound problem with ascribing participatory involvement and community engagement to users per se, is its neglect of the substantial role a site's interface plays in manoeuvring individual users and communities (2009, p. 45).

As van Dijck argues, besides the complexity of various degrees of user-participation, the influence of YouTube's interface that organises and automatically promotes, which often tends to be ignored, has a noticeable impact on the characterisation of YouTube, thus leading us to examine YouTube as a commercial platform.

8.7 YouTube as a commercial site

The celebration of user-empowerment tends to generate a focus on YouTube's production of creativity, communities and social networks, which tends to ignore that the content cannot be analysed and discussed without the involvement of the influence of YouTube's status as a commercial platform controlled by YouTube Inc.

This commercial aspect is also recognised by Burgess and Green in their volume *YouTube – Online Video and Participatory Culture* (2009). They argue that the commercial success of YouTube is very much linked to the success and creativity of the YouTube community. This intertwined relationship thus, according to Burgess and Green, is a core issue of the complexity of YouTube. The overall argument seems to be that the YouTube community generates creativity and innovation while the commercial industry of YouTube takes advantage of this, thus turning YouTube into a mainstream commercial platform. This is no surprise with the takeover by Google Inc., which as a corporate entity intends to earn money on YouTube. As argued by Burgess and Green, "It is the participants in YouTube's social network who are producing much of YouTube's cultural, social and economic value" (ibid., p. 98), while they conclusively argue that YouTube Inc. needs to take the impact of participation seriously in order to maintain and benefit from YouTube (ibid., p. 99).

YouTube is fundamentally a commercial corporation in terms of Google Inc.'s ownership since 2006. This has created a platform that promotes content that is already popular and promoted, leaving even less space for the small communities and social networks. As demonstrated in the article *Categorising YouTube*, YouTube generates through its browsing and search functions what Cha et al. have called an "information bottleneck" or what we can regard as "power-law" distribution, as I will return to in the next section. This also means that promoted videos earn their existence in terms of visibility tied to the interface of YouTube, which they gain either by buying visibility or earning it through views and subscriptions. Most YouTubers have no alternative to YouTube for the distribution of content. They are therefore forced to accept the distribution forms presented by YouTube. The YouTube interface is thereby also defining the parameters for obtaining YouTube Partnership.

Even though many aspects of the YouTube community as a social network can be recognised in how much of the content is addressed directly towards its users, it is becoming more and more difficult not to see the dominance of YouTube partners and the striving for views, ratings, subscribers and comments as indications of a commercial dominance. Nonetheless, the impression of authenticity towards the YouTube viewers, however, is still a fundamental issue, but all in the context of visibility, both in terms of being social and sharing your identity, but also very much as a competitive factor. This is not least because of the interface and organisation of content, which in the end is controlled by YouTube Inc.

8.8 YouTube as power-law distribution

YouTube is signalling user-empowerment by building its principal search functions on folksonomies (cf. *7.4*), i.e., user-generated tags that allow creators to add idiosyncratic keywords to their videos when uploading their content. The term "Folksonomy" was coined by Thomas Vander Wal, who on his website defines Folksonomy:

> Folksonomy is the result of personal free tagging of information and objects (anything with a URL) for one's own retrieval. The tagging is done in a social environment (usually shared and open to others). Folksonomy is created from the act of tagging by the person consuming the information. [Retrieved from Vander Wal (2005) 11th October 2011.].

The term is thus defined within the context of the participatory culture and is an illustration of user-generated empowerment. On YouTube, folksonomies are integrated in the uploading process; i.e., users are asked to add tags to their videos. The tags function as keyword IDs that present users with the possibility of integrating YouTube's search options. The folksonomy-based search system is in that sense the principle navigational tool on YouTube. It also suggests that YouTube provides a fundamental bottom-up search structure. But at the same time it quickly becomes evident that tags are frequently misleading and overruled by YouTube's interface and search structure. Cha et al. have shown in their early study of YouTube that "popularity distribution of UGC exhibits power-law" (2007, p. 2) and they argue "10% of the top popular videos account for nearly 80% of views" (ibid., p. 3). Matthew Hindman demonstrates, in his investigation of the link structure of political websites, how the websites are power-law distributed as a consequence of Google's search engine, the ranking algorithm (where sites with the largest amount of links are ranked the highest), which is founded within an elementary hyperlink structure (2009, p. 44). From this principle and through his empirical investigation, Hindman created the concept "Googlearchy", with which he describes how very few sites dominate a majority of the, in this case, blogs, similar to "the rich get richer" principle (cf. Cha et al. 2007), which also leads to a maintenance of niche content as niche content:

> Googlearchy suggests that the number of links pointing to a site is the most important determinant site of visibility. Sites with lots of inbound links should be easy to find; sites with few inlinks should require more time and more skill to discover. All else being equal, sites with more links should receive more traffic (…) Googlearchy suggest that this dependence on links should make niche dominance self-perpetuating (Hindman 2009, p. 55).

The question is can "Googlearchy" be applied to describe YouTube? It is obvious that this matter is much more complicated on YouTube since Google's searches are based on "html" transformations of texts and the videos in flash format cannot as such be translated into text. In terms of a keyword search, it is rather the explicit meta-data that decides visibility on YouTube based on titles, tags and descriptions that are being translated into links, similar to Google's algorithm. As the site is owned by Google, and as of November 2011 is being implemented into *Google+*, along with the fact that YouTube Partners need an AdSense account to become a partner, it is reasonable to consider YouTube as part of the same ranking algorithm. However, to my knowledge there are no concrete investigations of this, other than Cha et al.'s early study, which states that YouTube is in fact following the same ranking principle as Google. If we thus accept the argument that it is the number of links that decides the rank of a video being listed from a keyword search, these links can be translated into numerous factors including: views, ratings, comments, sharing, channel views, subscribers, exterior links and several other factors. As argued in section *6.4*, an underlying complexity is to grasp the distinction between the content and the media platform. The process of making meaning by navigating through tags and through the YouTube search hierarchy instead of the actual content demonstrates this complexity. These are ultimately dependent on YouTube's hierarchical interface, since as also argued in *Categorising YouTube*, even random key word searches are organised hierarchically, favouring the already popular content.

According to Hindman's concept of "Googlearchy", niche content will most likely remain niche content, thereby challenging the argument that the Internet is dominated by a "long tail" distribution form as proposed by Chris Anderson (2006). At risk of describing a paradox, Anderson's model describes the accessibility of the Internet, where as he states: "The invisible market has turned visible" (2006, p. 6), thus stressing Jenkins's claim that, e.g., fan media is no longer niche content, but public for everyone. The same goes for YouTube, which has also gained its overall dominance in terms of the widespread access to the Internet, where as Anderson claims "everybody can find an audience" (ibid.). But the fact is that although someone will most likely see your video on YouTube, it is nothing in

comparison to the number of comments and views the most popular YouTube content can attract. YouTube celebrities such as Phillip DeFranco (*Sxephil*), Charles Trippy (*CTFxC*) and Michal Buckley (*Whatthebuckshow*) were referred to in previous studies of YouTube, with data from 2007 (e.g., Guzdial and Landry 2008, Burgess and Green 2009) or later by Strangelove (2010), and they have maintained this position as of 2012. They have just added more channels and along with other YouTubers such as *The Shaytards*, *ShaneDawsonTV* and *RayWilliamJohnson*, we see many of the same creators of UGC dominate the most popular content in 2007, 2009 as well as in the beginning of 2012. This does not deny the principle of the long tail, since almost all videos on YouTube manage to receive at least one view or a comment in some way or another, but it has not changed the criteria of market value of the most popular content as proclaimed by Anderson's emphasis on the long tail. The long tail may well describe the widespread use of YouTube, where many of the four billion videos being watched every day are consumed in the long tail and in that sense capture the essence of YouTube when, e.g., functioning as a media archive. But it still does not change the fact that in regards to social and economic value it is the all ready popular YouTubers who receive all the attention, as illustrated with the YouTube Partner Programme. Visibility in terms of thousands of comments or views is rewarded, while videos with 3-5 comments, other than contributing to the YouTube statistics, are not given much attention by YouTube Inc. In that sense, Anderson's "long tail", on the one hand, describes the majority of the content on YouTube, but, on the other hand, it does contradict what he states as "The End of The Hit Parade" (2006, p. 31), which Justin Bieber's music video *Baby ft. Ludacris* with more than 699 million views and 7,3 million comments demonstrates. There are YouTube hits and videos with many views and comments that are favoured in comparison with videos with fewer views.

YouTube contributes to this through its interface and search functions. Consider a simple keyword search as described in chapter *2.4,* where a random search will most likely let you find the videos you are looking for, but in most cases the results are a list of already popular content, hierarchical organised with the most discussed or viewed in the top and the videos with less comments and views at the end of the search list. A keyword search signals the difficulty of finding niche content on YouTube if you do not know the exact title of the video. It is also obvious that the genre-based browsing categories provided by YouTube are dominated by the most popular content; i.e., no niche content can be found in these categories through browsing. The already existing browsing categories are furthermore irrelevant, as the creators of videos frequently use misleading tags in order to increase traffic based on popular tags, rather than what actually describing the concrete content (also see *Categorising YouTube*).

This might also be related to the YouTube Partners, who receive payments for creating videos in terms of product placement, subscribers, comment writers, views or ratings. They are therefore overtly dependent on the "Googlearchy" system, in which visibility becomes the principal objective. According to YouTube's website, one of the minimum requirements of becoming a partner is that "you regularly upload videos that are viewed by *thousands* of YouTube users" [My Italics] (cf. YouTube website[19]). In regards to bloggers, Hindman talks about a cultural elite of bloggers facilitated by the Googlearchy principle, who seem to have replaced old expert systems (2009, pp. 140-141). Graeme Turner, following Hindman, argues for a "rise of a new aristocracy of opinion" (2010, p. 139). I do not state this exact same thing takes place on YouTube, but with the growth of YouTube Partners among ordinary creators of UGC, Partners are increasingly becoming the predominant contributors of the most popular content on YouTube, which suggests a growing gap between "power-law" contributors and contributors of niche content, as will be elaborated later in regards to the sample.

[19] See link: http://www.youtube.com/creators/partner.html#qualifications.

Summing up, this approach challenges the idea of a shared bottom-up structure where co-creativity and collective intelligence dominate the flow of information. What the power-law distribution argues, i.e., of a growing gap between ordinary creators and YouTube partners, is few-to-many communication rather than many-to-many. It does not mean regular users and comment writing users do not get heard. They are frequently integrated in the video through comments and competitions and furthermore used to authenticate belongingness to the YouTube community, but the idea of a shared community, where all contributors are equal participants, regardless of this, is being challenged along with the emergence and visibility of YouTube Partners.

8.9 Visibility on YouTube

What YouTube also implies about becoming a partner, with their emphasis on the ability to attract many comments, ratings or views, is the ability to become visible. The contextual communication of YouTube is very much centred on the achievement of visibility. YouTubers are reminded about the need for visibility by YouTube's official encouragement in their recent academy[20]. Moreover, most of the books being published about YouTube are guides on how to gain visibility and celebrity status. One just needs to take a look at these titles:

- *15 Minutes of Fame – Becoming a Star in the YouTube Revolution* (2008)
- *YouTube: An Insider's Guide to Climbing the Charts* (2008)
- *How to Make Money with YouTube* (2009)
- *Get Seen: Online Video Secrets to Building Your Business* (2010)
- *Beyond Viral: How to Attract Customers, Promote Your Brand, and Make Money with Online Video* (2011)
- *Conquering YouTube: 101 Pro Video Tips to Take You to the Top* (2011)

All of these titles seem to address the common objective of obtaining visibility in the context of YouTube via marketing and production commodity. Additionally, users are being inspired by other videos where integrated tags and annotations encourage user-interaction that will lead to a higher visibility. Visibility on YouTube can thus be considered from two perspectives: one that is concerned with YouTube's affordances as a media platform and organiser of content (e.g., tags, views and comments) and one that has to do with being visible within content, i.e., of performative behaviour.

In regards to the first perspective, visibility is frequently referred to in regards to social control or accordingly to Foucault's famous metaphor on modern society as the "Panopticon", where visibility is juxtaposed with power (cf. 1979). This is also how Hindman regards visibility and it is an aspect that can be reflected in the functions of YouTube as a database, where visibility is equal to promotion and thereby also power in terms of YouTube Partner status. Foucault was interested in visibility in regards to the phenomenon of surveillance and less in regards to communication. Visibility on YouTube is less concerned with surveillance and I shall therefore not involve Foucault here, but it usefully suggests that visibility is associated with power and social status. This also links visibility to different social classes on YouTube, where partners who gain more visibility in terms of traffic on their channels and in their videos are considered to have higher social and authoritative status than creators who have less traffic (I shall return to this in the analysis of *The Shaytards (11.1)*).

[20] The YouTube academy officially states: "building your identity on YouTube is to gain your audience and followers in order to lead this content revolution" in the video *Be a Creator: Introducing the YouTube creator institute* (01:01-01:027). Retrieved September 20, 2011 at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VK0JCO4_C2w.

In regards to the second perspective, we can simultaneously understand visibility in relationship to social behaviour and identity. Without going further into Axel Honneth's sociological theory of recognition, I will briefly refer to how Honneth, within his theory on recognition, peripherally addresses aspects of visibility:

> A certain person is first of all cognized as an individual with particular properties in particular situations, and, in a second step, this cognition is given public expression in that the existence of the person perceived is confirmed before the eyes of those present through actions, gesture or facial expressions (2002, p. 116).

Visibility in other words can be regarded as a performative act, related to social recognition, where the ability to perform specific forms of gestures is fundamental to obtaining visibility, while not making gestures results in invisibility and thus non-existence. Hence, identity is related to being visible as also argued in the *Performative Way of YouTube,* and also by Anne Jerslev and Rune Gade who consider the acknowledgment of the subject as "being *seen doing*" (2005, p. 7) [Italics in original]. In a similar way, YouTubers gain their status and visibility by presenting themselves in front of an audience. I therefore argue that visibility on YouTube is inherently linked to performative social behaviour, in which creators explicitly adapt and present specific performative versions of themselves as they are well aware of themselves in the light of others.

With reference to contemporary media, Graeme Turner uses the term "the demotic turn" to describe the transformation of ordinary people's visibility in public space, which also associates visibility with addressing an audience:

> I coined the term 'the demotic turn' as (…) referring to the increasing visibility of the 'ordinary person' as they have turned themselves into media content through celebrity culture, reality TV, DIY web-sites, talk radio and the like (2010, p. 2).

As Turner also underlines, visibility is a widespread phenomenon that can also be seen in light of one of Erving Goffman's overall arguments in *The Presentations of Self in Everyday Life* (1990/1959), stating that the self is very much constituted in "the presence of others" (cf. 1959, p. 244).

From a similar perspective, addressing the visibility of politicians in regards to electronic and digital media, John B. Thompson speaks of a new form of visibility that, despite its lack of a here and now, has resulted in an intimate mode of self-presentation:

> The development of communication media thus gave rise to a new kind of de-spatialized visibility, which allowed for an intimate form of self-presentation freed from the constraints of co-presence. These were the conditions that facilitated the rise of what we could call 'the society of self-disclosure': a society in which it was possible and, indeed, increasingly common for political leaders and other individuals to appear before distant audiences and lay bare some aspect of their self or their personal life (2005, p. 35).

Although Thompson, echoing Meyrowitz, primarily describes how media allow politicians to be transformed into ordinary human beings, he also describes a type of visibility on YouTube as a common cultural phenomenon, where performative behaviour is linked to the intimate visibility of the self that is created when people address themselves directly to the audience and how visibility in terms of the general need for self-disclosure is thus also related to identity. This is even further accentuated on YouTube as there is no interference between creators and audience, but a more direct and thus intimate simulation of face-to-face communication that enables ordinary people to perform public identities, of which YouTube has turned out to be the somewhat perfect facilitator.

8.10 Identity from a socio-cultural perspective

An underlying theme of this chapter has been the relationship between social interaction and media impact, where the former in terms of cultural studies involves subcultures (Hebdige), gender (Butler) and race (Hall), while the participatory culture approach involves a focus on the group identity of individual users and the social and cultural meaning created by people who especially engage with social media. At the same time, the medium theory approach has emphasised the contextual influence and impact of media. With the incorporation of these two approaches we must also discuss what is meant by identity, as this dissertation is explicitly concerned with online identity formation.

Well aware that a large aspect of identity formation is inherently associated and related to the psychological processes of, e.g., adolescence, I will address identity formation on YouTube from a sociological point of view outlined by Goffman, Meyrowitz as well as the different approaches emerging from the traditions of cultural studies.

A basic notion of identity formation is Erving Goffman's (1990/1959) depiction of different forms of social interaction that make an overall distinction between "front-region" and back-region" behaviour. Since Goffman's thoughts on identity formation are already discussed in the article *The Performative Way of YouTube*, I shall not go into detail regarding his approach, but briefly refer to his emphasis on the performance, which is highly relevant in terms of how people present themselves for example in the content on YouTube. This is also related to Goffman's concept of "impression management", suggesting that identity is very much related to how we present ourselves in the presence of others (1959, p. 203 pp.). This approach is also adapted by Meyrowitz, who situates Goffman's model in regards to electronic media and suggests a new situation of communication emerges out of the presence of electronic media is what he refers to as "Middle Region Space" as situations where public and private behaviour merge (1985, p. 47) (cf. *The Performative Way of YouTube*).

Charles Cooley's concept of "looking-glass self", for more than one hundred years, has presented the idea that identity is also related to how individuals are shaped throughout interpersonal communication and through the perceptions of other people (cf. 1964/1902). Cooley preceded the construction of the self from the sociological approach to self, which is also known as "symbolic interactionism".

I previously touched upon this approach's similarities and acknowledgment to what is also being referred to as "symbolic interactionism", coined by Herbert Blumer (1986/1969), who reports George Herbert Mead (1934) as the main theoretical influence (also see Marshall 1998). Mead describes how identity is created through interaction with others, as a process of self-realisation of the individual's place in an environment, and which is a coexistence between other people and the individual, thereby creating an image of the self as a social object. He refers to this aspect as the "generalized other":

> The attitude of the generalized other is the attitude of the whole community (…) If the given human individual is to develop a self in the fullest sense, it is not sufficient for him to merely to take the attitudes of other human individuals (…) he must also, in the same way that he takes the attitudes of other individuals (…) as members or an organized society or social group (…) only in so far as he takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which he belongs (…) does he develop a complete self (1934, pp. 154-155).

From this perspective, the self is part of a reflexive process analogous to how Anthony Giddens (1991) proposes the process of identity as a "self-reflexive" process based on people's interaction and experience with everyday life, from which people mirror and create autobiographical narratives. In a similar way, the self, according to Mead, is constituted in a realisation process in the dynamic relationship between the self and the self's awareness of the "generalized other" as well as the "significant other" (the people with whom the self has a more intimate relationship).

Meyrowitz also adopts Mead's notion of the generalised other as he states that electronic media "alter one's 'generalized other' - the general sense of how other people think and evaluate one's actions" (1985, p. 131). In this way, "the generalized other" is no longer just the people we interact with in face-to-face situations, but also in mediated communicative situations. Meyrowitz exemplifies this with how minorities through electronic media provide a standard of comparison for inequalities and thereby initiate a process of realisation of the self in relationship to the "mediated generalized other": "Information integration makes social integration seem more possible and desirable" (ibid., p. 133). On YouTube, the specific ways in which people present themselves in mediated and symbolic form regarded as performances are central to how we can conceptualise the "generalized other" on YouTube in terms of directly addressing the audience, and as argued in *The Performative Way of YouTube,* a performance is always a performance *for* someone (cf. Carlson 1996, p. 6) and thus fundamentally associated with visibility. YouTubers always present themselves when uploading, with the awareness of an undisclosed audience evaluating them.

As Meyrowitz argues, electronic media extend the way the subject is being looked at and evaluated in public. On YouTube this is even more accentuated in terms of ratings and comments that let viewers make instant evaluations of the creators and direct access to feedback that television does not provide. From the creators' perspective, this awareness that their "generalized other" is being constantly evaluated, eventually leads to specific social behaviour within the videos, with a possible consequence of a more direct interaction and articulation of the viewers as well as an increased awareness of the necessity of being sincere and authentic. This is exemplified in the fact that many videos apply meta-commenting layers that refer to reality, by addressing their own audiovisual construction. Consequently, this aspect is also similar to the process of meaning from a hermeneutic perspective as described by Paul Ricoeur (1984) in his description of the relationship between the text and the reader. Overall, we can understand identity formation as a process, an on-going project that is coined very much as performative, yet controlled by the "generalized other" and that moreover is adjusted according to how it is being evaluated. On YouTube, at the same time, you can notice how the "generalized other" is sometimes identified as a "significant other", especially when certain viewers create stronger social ties with the creators, similar to personal relationships, as will be elaborated in the analysis. This also illustrates the need to make a distinction between viewers who not only consume content (as the generalized other) and viewers who participate and engage more personally with the videos (a significant other).

8.10.1 Identity in between presentation and representation

As another issue, the concept of identity is mentioned in the *Performative Way of YouTube,* also discussed from a constructivist perspective; e.g., Judith Butler sees identity as a performative act, a rehearsed act confirming an already existing identity, as she sees identity founded "in the citational legacy by which a contemporary 'act' emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions" (1993, p. 225). In a similar way, Stuart Hall sees identity as a discourse that does not exist outside of this: "identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific and institutional sites with specific discursive formations" (1996, p. 4). Although YouTube has not yet defined any clear conventional forms of communication, we can notice a dominant symbolic and mediated presentation of the self.

This also raises the question of how we generate meaning through texts and images. One of the most consistent discussions takes place around the term "representation", which, e.g., involves representation in art as well as in politics. Both aspects are relevant, but in regards to this project and the discussion of identity formation, i.e. how people create online versions of themselves as

performances, the notion of presentation is perhaps equally important, and is at the same time inherently linked to the notion of representation. The most simple meaning of "a representation" is straightforward, as proposed by Mitchell (1990): "representation is always of something or someone, by something or someone, to someone" (p. 14). To this, a creator can be added in the sense that a representation is also always sent or uttered by someone. Basically, a representation is then something that stands in for something else, communicated by someone to someone else, or, it could be stated: a representation is always being *presented* by someone. This is not a surprise; people know they are watching a video on YouTube and that this video is a representation of somebody who is presenting it for us. This relationship is perhaps also interesting in regards to the perspective adopted in the constructivist approach.

With this approach, Stuart Hall, for example, advocates an understanding of representation that lies in the process of constructing meaning: "Representation is the process by which members of a culture use language (...) to produce meaning" (1997, p. 61). From Hall's perspective, the physical world is not given meaning before being communicated. He therefore emphasises a symbolic function in which representation has no required resemblance or physical relationship with the referent. This also echoes how Butler and Derrida consider identity as a constructed discourse that is given meaning only when being cited, as argued in *The Performative Way of YouTube*.

Representation, according to Hall, is based on the arbitrary relationship to the object, drawing on Saussure's understanding of the sign. Hall's approach emphasises the importance of how representation is primarily given meaning within the interaction between the text and the spectator. Representation always relies on the impression of spectators and their interpretation is therefore polysemic. Van Dijck (2009) argues that there are several levels of participation on YouTube in which users can be contributing participants (by writing comments, subscribing and video responding) or more traditional viewers who use YouTube as regular streaming. The level of involvement for instance through subscribing or reading comments enables a different reading, and in that sense YouTube is open for polysemic readings. This also becomes relevant to how we can identity the YouTube community, as well as to involve a distinction between users with knowledge about how to navigate on YouTube, and the users who have not adopted this knowledge and understanding of, e.g., the YouTube community and how to adapt to its social norms.

Another issue that I shall also return to later in the analysis is that audiovisual presentations of the self in most cases are non-fictional presentations and that are perceived by an audience as authentic self-presentations. This does not mean they are authentic in the sense of being exact reproductions of the referential reality, just like the representation is always biased as, e.g., argued by Nöel Carroll who in regards to the film medium emphasises its "selective nature" (2003, p. 116).

Audiovisual self-presentations on YouTube, despite being predominantly texts of non-fiction, nonetheless are mediated presentations of the self that present a specific version of reality in which the Vlogger plays a certain role and takes on an identity that only exists in a controlled mediated form. This form is created by the presence of the camera and under the influence of YouTube as a specific media platform. Hence, Hall's constructionist argument that meaning is constructed in the representational process to some extent also does apply to the Vlog, if we regard the Vlog as a subjective performative expression of the self. It also refers to Goffman's understanding of the performing self, when he speaks about "the impression of reality" (1959, p. 28), where the performer needs to be convinced that what he is presenting is real, just like the spectator or listener judges the performer or creator on his or her ability to present the impression of reality.

But if we briefly return to the constructionist approach, it is important to stress that what this approach does not account for is that this online identity perhaps is a constructed and mediated version of the self, but it is simultaneously constituted through the referential representation of a real person who verifies the impression of authenticity. A fundamental issue that challenges this idea is also the integration of self-reflexivity, which I shall elaborate on in the following chapters; it is an explicit part of many audiovisual self-presentations and can be usefully examined in the context of what Joshua Meyrowitz sees as a Middle Region space. Thus, viewers access a side-stage view (Meyrowitz 1985, p. 47, also see *The Performative Way of YouTube*) that emphasises both the presentation of the self as well as its referential context. I argue that the YouTube videos are presenting identities that are presented in a mediated context, but always inherently linked to reality, illustrated by the fact that meaning and identity just as much take place in the para-texts discussing and making meaning of the videos. This is analogous to Giddens' notion of the modern reflexive self and Paul Ricoeur's notion of the relationship between the world of the text and the reader. This brings us to the final aspect of identity: authenticity.

8.10.2 Authenticity

As a videoblogger, one of the things that is important to me is to be a real person, sitting at home, in his bedroom, talking to his camera (01:02) - charlieissocoollike

This statement, from the Vlog *Feeling Inspired* created by the YouTuber *charlieissocoollike*, very much exemplifies the idea of authenticity as a fundamental value on YouTube: to present the audience a "real person", which thus also implies being true to yourself. Authenticity is not an exclusive value related to identity formation on YouTube, but is present in many different contexts and regarded as an inherent value in modern society in regards to food, art, holiday destinations, politicians (cf. Lindholm 2008) as well as in business, as argued by Gilmore and Pine (2007). Overall, authenticity can be said to be a fundamental aspect of modern identity formation; as argued by Charles Taylor in *The Ethics of Authenticity*: "Authenticity is a facet of modern individualism" (1991, p. 44).

Authenticity is also essential to YouTube, because self-presentation is not anonymous. Presenters are physically present on the screen, which makes it significantly more difficult to hide the notion of authenticity, unlike in written blogs or chat-rooms. On YouTube, most activity takes place around physical presentations of the self and interacting with these.

Being a feature of modern identity formation, authenticity is thus also inherently linked to performance, which is underlined by the fact that self-presentation is first and foremost about authenticating yourself to an audience. Taylor also underlines this, when he links authenticity to recognition: "our identity requires recognition by others" (ibid., p. 45). Taylor draws his notion of authenticity from Lionel Trilling, who considers authenticity a "moral concept" (cf. 1973, p. 11), which arose from the concept of "sincerity" (ibid.). The difference between the two terms can be summed up in the distinction between saying what you mean and being what you are (ibid., p. 9). This is, however, complicated on YouTube, as argued in the previous section, because YouTube is a provider of online identities that are always mediated and performed identities that are also being judged by their performances.

We could also state that on YouTube being "what you are" is inherently linked to sincerity ("saying who you are") in terms of the performative meaning of "doing", as has been argued by J. L. Austin (1975), and touched upon in the previous section, identity is very much about being *seen doing*. People present themselves and become authenticated by the performative (and here mediated) act. It is

therefore more accurate to consider authenticity as the ability to provide the *impression* of authenticity since it exists online as a recorded performance that is a selective version of reality.

This means YouTubers are being judged by their audience on whether the presentation of the self proves to be authentic or "non-authentic" in terms of not being who you present yourself to be. Non-authenticity also includes not being a YouTuber or not being in your natural environment. The most noticeable way to accomplish authenticity on YouTube is through self-reflexivity. Throughout the sample, the Vlogs especially have been characterised by embedding a layer of self-reflexivity and self-reflection that seems to have become a standard mode of authenticating the self as a mediated performer, who at the same time is a true person.

This process of self-reflection allows individuals to construct a distinction between what Susannah Stern, in regards to identity and self-reflection within blogs, refers to as a distinction between "real and ideal selves" (2008, p. 102). I argue that authenticity on YouTube is completely about providing the perfect balance between the real self and the ideal self. This balance is also related to a sense of belongingness similar to how Charles Lindholm refers to authenticity:

> Authenticity gathers people together in collectives that are felt to be real, essential, and vital, providing participants with meaning, unity, and a surpassing sense of belonging (2008, p. 1).

The sense of belonging can perhaps be understood in the principal distinction between UGC and non-UGC. Creators of UGC are implicitly associated with YouTube because they create content for YouTube, while creators of non-UGC belong to a mass-media culture that embed YouTube as a distribution platform. By producing UGC you authenticate yourself in comparison to professional, established media producers who do not follow YouTube's original slogan "Broadcast yourself"; they broadcast somebody else, while creators of UGC one way or another broadcast themselves.

In the article *Authenticity as authentication* (2002) Allan Moore discusses authenticity in the relationship between "authentic" and "commercial" music that somewhat describes the relationship between UGC and non-UGC. Creators and viewers share the idea of UGC as more authentic because they belong to a YouTube community. Of course this paradigm is relative, as paradoxically demonstrated by the YouTube Partner Programme; creators of UGC within the community are moreover simultaneously identified as commercial agents that create content for a living without being regarded as non-authentic despite that much of their performative behaviour is clearly accentuated by the commodification of YouTubing. But the interesting point is that as long as they acknowledge the community of YouTube and its principal modes of communicating, which also include transparency (through self-reflexivity) and user-involvement, they are judged by their ability to perform an impression of authenticity. Finally, this sense of belongingness in regards to authenticity and how it verifies you as a person on YouTube is perhaps also reflected in communicating "ordinariness", which according to Paddy Scannell is an underlying element of sincerity:

> Sincerity, we might say, is nowadays one defining characteristic of any person appearing in the public realm who lays claim to ordinariness. It is how you prove you are like the rest of us (1996, p. 74).

On YouTube, we can in a similar way regard how a sincere impression of the self is established through the emphasis that many YouTubers put on their status of being regular guys, or providing an everyday picture of their personal lives recorded from their domestic settings with their friends and families. It is moreover an element that can be found in the specific aesthetics of YouTube that have been referred to as "home-mode" (cf. Chalfen 1987), amateur-style or a low-grade style, that nonetheless signals that YouTubers are basically "like the rest of us", which finally is also related to the notion of transparency

provided by self-reflexivity that creates the image of being a YouTuber and at the same time being an ordinary person.

Overall, I argue that the notion of authenticity in terms of using YouTube to present the self as a real person is essential. But it must not be ignored that this simultaneously takes place in a mediated and performative context where authenticity is about providing the impression of authenticity in the role as a YouTuber.

8.11 Summing up

This chapter has addressed many issues, including a point of reference from the principles of cultural studies, but at the same time it has examined issues that have moved the arguments presented here beyond the traditional context of cultural studies. The aim was not to apply an overall framework of cultural studies, but to apply many of the issues especially in regards to popular culture and approaches that have grown out of the tradition. It also helped contextualise the aspects of medium theory that were discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, where for example a focus on agency could be added more easily.

YouTube is very much understood in relationship with agency and it was therefore also relevant to discuss elements of the participatory culture in depth, where it has been argued that the so-called "participatory" emphasis on YouTube must be contextualised and modified, both in terms of YouTube as a media platform and how its affordances influence the organisation and consumption of the content, but also with the relevant discussion of what has been referred to as a "digital optimism" (cf. Turner 2010) or a digital deterministic view on user-empowerment, as represented by, e.g., Jenkins (2006) and Tapscott (2009). This view has especially been criticised by, e.g., van Dijck (2009), Buckingham (2009) and Hindman (2009). This has been discussed and assessed in relation to YouTube as a commercial and competitive platform that needs to be taken into consideration when adopting the idea of YouTube as a grass-roots, bottom-up platform that is in constant danger of being taken over by commercial enterprises. But, it is perhaps the other way around; YouTubers have turned their status of ordinary and vernacular products into attractive commodities and in that sense the commercialisation of YouTube has not disempowered them, but strengthened their position; however, it has also foregrounded the marginalisation of non-YouTube Partners and illustrated how YouTube as a media platform implicitly controls the content.

The chapter has discussed YouTube within the context of cultural studies, where the popular content is increasingly dominating YouTube as a streaming platform (cf. *6.6.1*), also involved a focus on the concept of visibility; and in connection with this, the notion of audiovisual identity was presented within the context of symbolic interactionism, and argued that identity on YouTube is inherently associated with "impression management" and "the generalized other".

It has to be underlined that the notions of visibility and identity formation must be understood in the context of YouTube as a media platform that has created what is fundamentally a competitive platform that of course encloses non-profit creativity, sociability and a culture of Pro-Ams who produce content for leisure and playfulness. However, in regards to the most popular content, which I will address in the following, YouTube has become an expanding business – promoting and creating online presentations of the self has become a highly valued commodity.

Finally, the notion of authenticity has been emphasised as a fundamental characteristic of the self and it has been argued that it is also an important aspect of self-presentations on YouTube, which are situated in the historical reality and presented in a mediated form on YouTube, as what we can regard first and foremost as an impression of authenticity.

Analysis of identity-formation in the YouTube Vlog

9 – Analysing the Vlog

In the previous chapter, a medium theory inspired approach had been applied to provide a theoretical framework that could be useful for understanding how YouTube functions as a media platform. How YouTube offers specific affordances to its users is especially relevant, also in regards to how the following analyses can uncover the formation of identity in the content and how self-presentations can be characterised as somewhat different in regards to, e.g., different organisation of access, control and navigation. As also argued, medium theory predominantly must be considered a macro-scale approach that can provide us with an understanding of how YouTube influences the construction of identity in a communicative context and, e.g., how UGC and more specifically Vlogs appear on YouTube, e.g., in comparison to contemporary television. In particular, the tendencies in reality television are relevant and examples of these will thus be integrated into the following analysis of YouTube content in order to understand what constitutes the formation of identity on YouTube. But medium theory proves less useful in the concrete text analysis of the audiovisual content, where the focus especially will be on how creators present themselves and how social behaviour in terms of performances takes place, in the same way that involvement with users is of great importance.

It was therefore also relevant to involve aspects of the thematic issues being discussed in the context of the contemporary cultural studies that can be useful in order to turn focus towards the concrete communicative situation, taking place between the creator and the viewer within the content. This issue has also been touched upon in regards to what Goffman considers "impression management", and George H. Mead's interpretation of the self as the "generalized other", just as Joshua Meyrowitz argues how mediated self-presentations are linked to performances and furthermore influenced by specific mediated context within which it is presented.

9.1 Analytical approach

Identity formation on YouTube is the main analytical focus of this dissertation. In these remaining chapters of the dissertation, I will analyse identity on YouTube, which I will argue is inherently linked to understanding authenticity. I will elaborate on how authenticity is created within the UGC and more specifically the YouTube Vlog, where I consider authenticity a principal element in understanding what makes this type of content unique on YouTube and what constitutes the presentation of the self in this specific form. Furthermore, the performative perspective and the traditions pointing back to the documentary representation of reality also are essential to the form of authenticity found in the Vlogs. Through this focus, I shall attempt to demonstrate how we can identify online identities within the Vlog.

This method of investigation thus includes the combination of a medium theory approach, represented by Meyrowitz with aspects of Goffman's micro-sociology also involving performance theory, as well as theories investigating contemporary documentary and reality programmes that can be considered somewhat both antecedent as well as actual parallels to the YouTube Vlog, and that furthermore relates to some of the aspects discussed in the context of cultural studies. I shall also draw on some of the arguments made in the two articles *Presentations of the Self on YouTube* and *The Performative Way of YouTube*. Finally, as a concrete tool of analysing the Vlogs, I shall make use of typological distinctions between what I consider different forms of Vlogs, similar to the overall taxonomic distinction presented in *Categorising YouTube*.

In the following, I will present some of the most representative and most popular examples of three distinct types of Vlogs. All videos included are part of the sample selected in July and August 2010. Moreover, I will frequently include comments written as direct responses to the videos to which they are attached and which will provide the analysis with a perspective on the viewers' reception. Since most of these videos contain several thousand comments, it is beyond the scope of this project to provide a fully representative picture of these comments. I have therefore limited the references of comments to include only the first page of comments, which are added below each video.

I will begin the discussion with how we can regard the Vlog as a text of non-fiction and briefly present a perspective on documentary representation.

9.2 Situating the Vlog in the media historical context of non-fiction

Although a Vlog is both a representation and a presentation, it can be noted in comparison to non-fiction how the emphasis in many audiovisual texts of non-fiction is on the mode of presenting reality rather than objectively representing it. As mentioned in section *3.6.*, John Corner refers "post-documentary", which describes a shift towards documentaries with an emphasis on more subjective and performative modes of representations, including a more self-reflexive interplay with the media than previous forms of non-fiction involved. In *The Presentations of the Self on YouTube*, a parallel was drawn with previous modes of first-person media forms such as digital storytelling (cf. Lambert 2010) or video diaries (both, however, had a somewhat more serious function, just like earlier modes of the Vlog; cf. Miles 2003, Luers 2007, Warmbrodt et al. 2008). The YouTube Vlog more closely resembles traditional home movies, as investigated by Richard Chalfen (1987), in terms of primarily addressing joyful and positive selections from everyday life. At the same time, it is also clear how the YouTube Vlog differs from the home movie in terms of its emphasis on subjectivity and more explicit articulation of the "generalised other". In that sense, it has more in common with contemporary reality television and what has been defined as performative documentary modes (cf. Nichols 1994, Bruzzi 2001, Jerslev 2005b). This aspect is supported by an investigation in the earlier chapter on methodology and coding process, where a clear predominance of performative modes of communication was registered within UGC. And although only an indication, the coding shows a correspondence with contemporary non-fiction texts where intentional objective or expository modes of communication have been abandoned and replaced by more subjective, reflexive and, not least, entertaining modes of non-fiction (cf. Corner 2002, p. 149 ff.)

9.3 Three types of Vlogs

The YouTube Vlog is characterised by a first-person presentation of the self, but there are different ways to present oneself. For many YouTubers, it is common to have several channels, each providing an individual presentation of self. The self on YouTube can thus be regarded as multiple selves, each with individual, distinctive and intentional functions. It is therefore also necessary to distinguish between some of the most obvious differences.

The different forms of Vlogs previously have been examined by, e.g., Warmbrodt et al. (2008). They examined three main types of Vlogs in their investigation of the streaming site *VlogDIR*, i.e., "Personal Vlogs", "News Shows" and "Entertaining Vlogs":

> (…) personal vlogs, news shows, and entertainment orientated". Personal vloggers talk about or even share their life experiences captured by a video camera and are thus more of a personal media than a television show. Besides personal vlogs about the vlogger's life, there are news shows which are informal newscasts on a wide variety of topics (…) Also there are vlogs that exist for purely entertainment reasons (2008, p. 2).

Although Warmbrodt et al.'s distinctions are useful, especially in regards to the personal Vlog, the distinctions also appear somewhat blurred. For example, it never becomes clear if a personal Vlog can also be entertaining and if not, why not? On YouTube, on the contrary, it is rare to find personal Vlogs among the most popular content that does not appear as if it is meant to be entertaining. In regards to YouTube, moreover, it is rare that Vlogs reflect upon the news without being entertaining. Although there are examples of serious and less entertaining Vlogs, it is difficult to make a distinction based on the degree of entertainment, at least in regards to the Vlogs analysed here.

In the following, I shall hence draw on Warmbrodt et al.'s distinction of three different types of Vlogs, but I will nevertheless redefine two of the types based on their distinctive ways of presenting the self in terms of social behaviour and how they address their audiences. Thus, the following three different types of Vlogs will be incorporated:

1) *The Personal Vlog,* also mentioned by Warmbrodt et al. (2008), has its main focus on the creators' personal lives and identities as Vloggers. In most cases, this is centred around the depiction of the creators' interactions with their friends and families. This type is also the most widespread Vlog type (cf. Figure 27).

2) *The Vlog Show* is identified in terms of the role of the presenter as a host, who does not reflect on personal issues, but through a monologue-based first-person presentation, the self is most often communicated in a reflexive and subjective interaction with, e.g., media and popular culture. The presentation of the self in the Vlog Show thus also appears more public than the previous more personal mode, but not necessarily less authentic.

3) *The Commodity Vlog*, like the other Vlogs, focuses on the self through the monologue-based first-person camera. But the self is constituted and presented in the reflection of a specific object, i.e., of a commodity. This type of Vlog in that sense is a more implicit and less direct self-presentation compared to the other forms.

The proportions of the different types of Vlogs are illustrated in Figure 27 below. The figure reveals a clear predominance of the personal Vlog, which is also the Vlog type with the most explicit form of self-presentation. This distinction of different types of Vlogs is based on a second coding of the 215 Vlogs, which were initially identified by the two coders and myself in the first coding. It was, however, not possible to involve coders in this secondary process. Thus, the second coding phase of the 215 Vlogs, in regards to specific type of Vlog which is thus conducted without an inter-coder reliability test. But, nonetheless, I will refer to the previous results that indicated homogeneity among the coders. The results are moreover primarily an analytical tool used to isolate and identify different forms of self-presentations rather than drawing any conclusion regarding tendencies, although it seems clear that the personal Vlog dominates this sample.

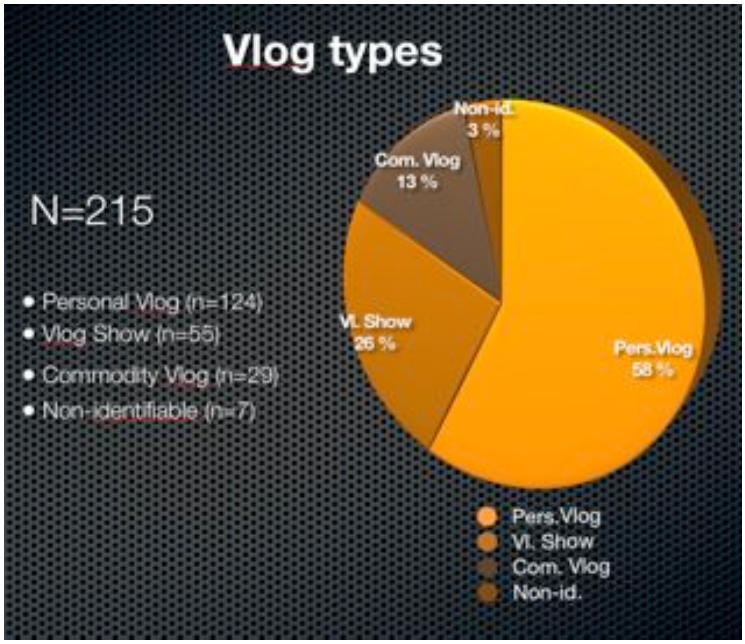


Figure 27: *Pie chart of different Vlogs types*

The main focus in the following will be on the personal Vlog and how aspects of authenticity and sincerity can be related to the presentation of the self. The two other types, however, also will be included in the analyses in order to identify the different aspects of online identity formation on YouTube as described in section *8.10*, where I will discuss and analyse the Vlogs especially in regards to how the impression of authenticity manifests itself within the content.

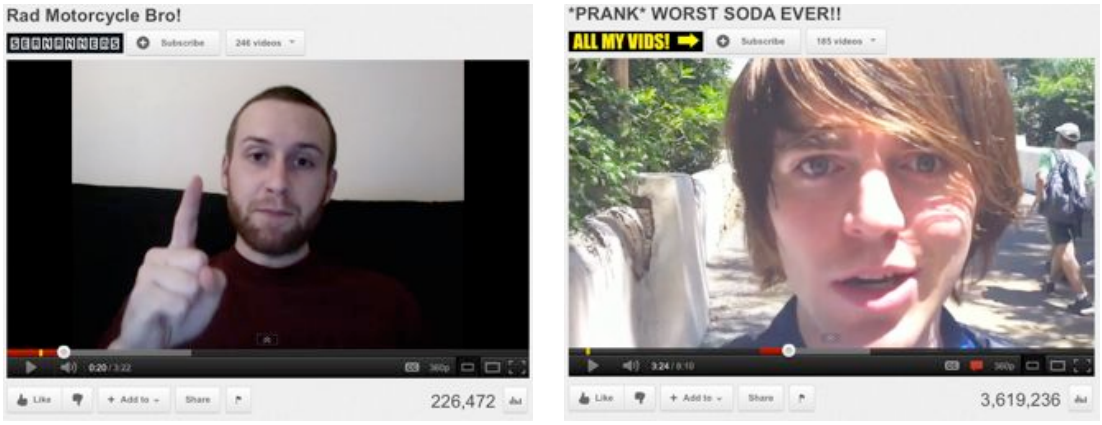
10 - The Personal Vlog

The personal Vlog is the most evident example of what previously has been identified as the traditional Vlog (cf. *The Presentations of the self on YouTube*), which, however, does not mean the two other types are not Vlogs. The personal Vlog is predominant in this sample, representing 58% of the registered Vlogs (cf. Figure 27). Even within the personal Vlog, there are several different modes of making personal self-presentations. All of them, however, are concerned with the depiction of the self. The personal Vlogs are first and foremost presentations of a subject who may adopt a social role, but unlike the host role of the Vlog Show and the presenting role of the commodity Vlog, the personal Vlog situates the individual in more personal and intimate settings. In the following analysis, I will outline how social performance and different roles can authenticate the Vloggers as real people who are capable of staging their personality just as they can create a mediated space of intimacy analogous to the interpersonal communicative situation.

10.1 The personal Vlog cam culture

The most basic mode to authenticate the self is through the specific style of Vlogging in which the role of the camera, its images as well as how they are edited influence how we can regard the Vlog as an authentic mode of self-presentation.

The YouTube Vlog is identified as a first-person representation, where the self is presenting personal parts of everyday life through either the use of a static web-cam embedded in a laptop, or as apparent through a more dynamic style in terms of mobile cell phone cameras or small pocket cameras. This latter style is characterised by the arm-extended position (cf. Luers 2007, p. 4; and as demonstrated in the *Presentation of the Self on YouTube*). In this sample, both types of positions are frequently apparent, and in many videos, the two camera modes are mixed together or the mobile cell-phone is placed somewhere static, e.g. in the front window of a car, and in that way serves the same function as the web-cam.



Static Web-cam position *Dynamic hand held position*

Figure 28: *Two Vlog positions*

10.1.1 The web-cam

The lens of the built-in camera is normally quite sensitive to locations with lower lighting and most pictures therefore appear more obscure than on a traditional camera. For the same reason, the presenting subject needs to lean closer to the screen in order for the camera to focus properly. This results in many close-ups of the creator. The involvement of close-ups is also an aspect mentioned by Stig Hjarvad, who argues that close-ups have the effect of allowing a mode of intimacy that cannot

exist in the real world, as we would feel intimated; but in the mediated context, "close-ups and ultra close up pictures bring the receiver into intimate visual contact with the depicted person" (2002, p. 245). This can be noticed in the close-up of Shane Dawson in Figure 28, which most likely would be inappropriate if we met him this close for the first time in a face-to-face situation.

With this type of first-person presentation, the technological constraints or affordances therefore automatically result in a more intimate style, which also is touched upon by Anja Hirdman (2010, p.6). In earlier examples of web-cam videos, viewers similar to voyeurs could observe live streaming of real-life registrations also referred to as life-casting (cf. *The Performative Way of YouTube*).

This mode of static registration has made Michele White regard the web-cam as an indexical registration of reality:

> Webcams and webcam sites appear to be real and to provide access to material bodies because they direct the user's attention to the referent – what is depicted – rather than the representation (2003, p. 12).

Although this argument ignores the inherent bias of the referent (e.g., by the framing of the camera, also see *8.10.1*), it nevertheless creates a strong impression of intimacy and a sense of being directly connected to the presenter. An interesting example of this intimacy is apparent in the video *Rad Motorcycle Bro!* made by *SeaNanners* (see Figure 28). In this video, *SeaNanners* talks directly to the built-in camera in his laptop, which he has placed on his lap. Although the camera is static, we can actually register his movements on the screen, when he simultaneously moves the laptop. This creates an experience in which we not only sense *SeaNanners*' gaze directly into the camera, but also his physical movements. The feature of non-interference that White mentions is first and foremost because of the live mode. This feature has changed with the emergence of YouTube, where presenters using a web-cam have edited the video before uploading and we rarely see live videos. But the web-cam in general is inherently tied to the location and the physical presence is thus always static, which is perhaps also why there is a tendency to embed other clips in the video, e.g., noticeable in the videos of *Community Channel*, who always adds visual layers, or *meekakitty*, who uses split-screens and integrates users. The static web-cam's spatial limitation also tends to have an impact on the length of the videos; it should be noted that Vlogs with a dynamic camera are significantly longer.

With increased mobility, the dynamic Vlog camera naturally records more activities and it provides the filming subject with the possibility to interact more with other people and the everyday environment, while the camera still provides the same sense of direct contact and physical presence. The video *WASTED ON BUTTER BEER!* is a personal Vlog, where the point of view is constantly changing between the static and the dynamic. In this video, the Vlogger *mel* in one scene is filming herself dancing, while holding the camera in the arm's-length position as shown in Figure 29:

Figure 29: *Dancing with the camera and the spectator*

The camera follows her movements and provides a strong sense of being physically present in the dance, as we the spectators get the feeling we are dancing with her. The dynamic camera in that sense extends the physical presence of being there to also include movement; we not only feel her movements, but also are almost feeling our presence. The principle behind the mobility of the camera is not a phenomenon unique to YouTube. If we take a quick historical look, the style of the Vlog, in terms of the camera, has similarities to the "Direct Cinema" style that was deployed by documentary directors like Frederick Wiseman or D. A. Pennebaker, who contributed to a change in production modes of the 1960s documentary, by adding a mobility to the filming process, creating a sense of "being there" (cf. Nichols 1991, Dovey 2004). In regards to the first-person position, the direct gaze of the camera, known from, e.g., a news host automatically creates a sense of intimacy and being personally addressed. And according to Bill Nichols, moreover, it creates an unmediated presence, which he refers to as a "pseudomonologue": "The pseudomonologue makes the viewer the subject of cinematic address, erasing the very mediations of filmmaker/subject/viewer that the interactive mode accentuates" (1991, p. 54). Even though we sense the direct approach as less mediated than if there had a been another person present, the mediated intimacy between a television host and the audience situated in a static studio, where we are not allowed to see what is going on outside the framing, is more distanced than in the Vlog. Multi-cameras are frequently being used to establish more dynamism in the television programme, but the mobility of the camera in the Vlog in terms of the extended arm's-length position is nevertheless different. It is ubiquitous – the subject is everywhere in contrast to the news clip, where the picture of the subject is eventually being replaced by a voiceover and illustrating footage. The dynamic camera of the personal Vlog can be said to dismantle the distinction of what in film-theory is referred to as "Off-screen" space (cf. Aumont 1997). That is "a section of space cut out by an act of looking organised in terms of a point of view" (p.169). Nothing in the Vlog is off-screen, nothing is hidden or cut out, as the camera looks in all directions and in that way the gaze of the camera authenticates the subject as transparent, where nothing is hidden when the camera is turned on.

10.2 Low grade aesthetic

In addition to this, the home movie aesthetic that can be identified in the Vlogs creates a low-grade style that also strengthens our impression of the real, i.e., that what we see is actually the unmediated version of the self, or as Jon Dovey argues in regards to camcorder culture:

> The low grade video image has become the privileged form of TV 'truth telling', signifying authenticity and an indexical reproduction of the real world: indexical in the sense of presuming a direct and transparent correspondence between what is in front of the camera lens and its taped representation (2004, p. 557).

Although the indexical reproduction of the real, which Dovey refers to, is always biased, and often coined by performative staged behaviour, the camera style nevertheless leaves an impression of a raw and unedited reality. An impression of "truth telling" also takes place in terms of providing a raw aesthetic of ordinariness that evokes a sense of authenticity. James Moran describes how the home movie mode in terms of its contextual connotation with everyday life, also foregrounds a sense of authenticity:

> *The home mode provides an authentic, active mode of media production for representing everyday life.* Because home mode practitioners are personally involved behind and in front of the camera (2002, p. 59) [Italics in original].

The personal Vlogs can be regarded in a similar way, i.e., how they authenticate that the Vlogger is both behind and in front of the camera also exhibited by the dynamic mobile camera and subjective point of view that involves the creator as presenter of his or her ordinary life, which we also see through the eyes of the subject or other family members rather than through the eyes of a film crew.

10.3 Editing

In many examples, the Vlogger seems to have little interest in the editing process, and the result is therefore an often fundamental lack of causality or any connection between the different scenes that instead appear rather fragmented. This discontinuity reinforces the rawness or amateur style that characterises a lot of UGC, as also noted in the registrations of keywords cf. *3.7*). It was observed that UGC could be characterised by a general absence of standard modes of aesthetics and audiovisual storytelling (also see Landry and Guzdial 2008). Further, editing is not used to dramatise things, e.g., through background music, which is only used in approximately 20% of the personal Vlogs, whereas it is used in approximately 37% of the Vlog Shows (cf. chapter *12*). The limited emphasis on editing can perhaps be explained by the fact that most Vloggers are one-person crews who film themselves, as well as edit the video afterwards. This little interest in editing is also highlighted by the fact that many Vloggers consistently upload quite a lot of material on a weekly basis, and some everyday, leaving less time to edit. The lack of editing leaves an impression of a raw, unedited registration.

It is, however, important to stress that none of these, i.e., camera positions, home movie style or lack of standard editing, are not a guarantee for authenticity. As several examples in the history of film as well as on YouTube show, authenticity can easily be imitated and most viewers through previous experiences with media have good capacities for detecting examples of frauds. As mentioned in *The Presentations of the Self on YouTube,* Donath and Boyd have emphasised the "social mechanism of reputation" (2004, p. 73) as a concrete process of how viewers on social networks expose hoaxes and frauds through engaging in social networks. On YouTube, this engagement can be detected in the process of writing and reading comments, where other viewers can gain knowledge and thus navigate throughout the content receiving clues and indications from other viewers of whether a presenter is being sincere as well as authentic. It therefore is more correct to argue that the specific camera position, aesthetic and fragmented editing characterise the Vlog as a specific mode of UGC that reinforces the impression of authenticity in regards to online identity-formation and self-presentation, but is not guarantee for authenticity.

10.4 A mode of non-fiction

A majority of the Vlogs has been coded as non-fiction. Among the personal Vlogs, 81% of the registered videos were identified in the primary coding process as non-fiction (cf. *3.5*), while the remaining videos (except for one) were coded as a mix between fiction and non-fiction. The predominance of non-fiction exists in a paradoxical relationship with the registration of self-reflexivity

that was observed in 83% of the personal Vlogs. Traditionally, "self-reflection" has been analogous with undermining the impression of authenticity (cf. Strangelove 2010, p. 75). In fiction, to draw attention to the non-diegetic is also to create a distance, as it draws attention to the outside reality. But in the documentary genre and in the personal Vlog, the highlighting of the referential connection to reality authenticates the mediated performance within the content and thus, calling attention to this, provides the Vlog with the ability to embed self-reflection as a tool to communicate transparency and consequently an authentic version of the self. The mode of self-reflection, rather than a distance from the experience of reality, reinforces the fact that it takes place in the very process of filming and that the camera becomes a natural device that articulates the mediated world the Vlogger presents for the audience. It thus reminds the audience of the relationship between the presentation and the representation (cf. *8.10.1*) and that the Vlogger is an online version of the self that exists both in a historical reality as well as online, i.e., performing on YouTube. Aspects of this have also been touched upon by Bill Nichols, who, in regards to the reflexive documentary, argues it is "the least naïve" mode of representation as stated in section *3.6*. And as cited in section *6.8*, Grusin and Bolter likewise regard "media excess" as "an authentic experience" (1999, p. 53) – just like Phillip Auslander (1999) argues that mediated experiences of music have succeeded in authenticating music, since mediated experiences have become an underlying experience of everyday life. Self-reflexivity can likewise be thought of as features embedded in everyday communication, where self-reflexivity is just as much about connecting and identification as creating distance (also see Grusin 2009 and *The Mashups of YouTube*).

10.5 Communicating transparency

Self-reflexivity as a mode of creating an impression of transparency is not only created through the use of specific aesthetics, but it is also being communicated. An interesting example of this is the personal Vlog video *Groceries*! made by *Pogobat*. *Pogobat*, or Dan as he refers to himself, is preparing a social experiment, where he is letting his viewers control his everyday life. In preparing for this, he is supported financially by his sponsors, who want to conduct a survey of his viewers' needs and interests so they can target their commercials more specifically. The interesting thing is that Dan presents the survey in his video, providing a link to it under the video (as shown in Figure 30), and he personally asks his viewers to take the survey. And people do, although in most cases they find it too long, but none of them seem to regard Dan, through the involvement of sponsors, as less authentic. The main reason, as suggested in three of the comments below the video, is that viewers establish a personal relationship while doing the survey for him – and thus ultimately authenticating him as a real person:

Figure 30: *Pointing to the survey in the link below the video*

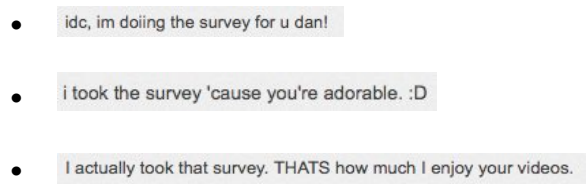


Figure 31: *Viewers commenting on the survey.*

This also indicates a tendency that can be found in many Vlogs, where viewers tend to create a strong and sometimes even personal and intimate relationship with the Vlogger, which I will elaborate further on in the next chapters.

10.6 Constructing identity through self-irony

Another popular YouTube channel is *CommunityChannel*, which uses self-irony as a consistent mode, as in this case of a female presenter communicating with her viewers in the video *Old Folks and Phone calls*. She tells and shows an anecdote about how "old" people call her by accident, declaring she hates old people: "I am only joking, I love old people, they give you money when they die!!...Joking.!" (01:50). In a similar way, many of her reflections are ironic statements that are followed by a depreciative distance towards herself, e.g., stating she cannot cook and that she has no friends, although we can sense she is not telling the truth. Without going further into notions of irony and self-depreciation, it is noticeable how self-reflection is being used to present the self from a distance that at the same time communicates transparency and sincerity. This mode of self-reflection can be found in many personal Vlogs (e.g., *The Shaytards*, *TristopiaTV*, *The Amazing Atheist*, *MrArturoTrejo*, *nerimon,* and *Jumbafund*), all tending to frequently joke about themselves as Vloggers.

In the case of *CommunityChannel*, we can notice an ironic self-presentation, while she at the same time tells us that this is only a façade, implicitly in order to amuse the audience and of course to dismantle any traces of arrogance. It is a mode of self-presentation that can be found throughout almost all personal Vlogs and that perhaps not only signals a reflection of the self, but just as much a reflection of Mead's "Generalized Other" (cf. *8.10*) as "an individual reflection of the general systematic pattern of social or group behaviour in which it and the others are all involved (1934, p. 158). Following this, self-irony can be interpreted as an expression of communicating to a shared group a mentality that levels and identifies the Vlogger with the audience.

YouTube provides a space of self-reflection, where creators are in control of designing and editing their own videos. In the video *I went sky diving!*, by *meekakitty*, the female Vlogger switches between an interactive self, who retells yesterday's episode, and constantly interrupting herself with fragments of small gestures and noises that function as self-ironic performances of her self. In a similar way, user-involvement is also being used frequently as a way of creating an ironic self-image, like in the case of *BrittaniLouiseTaylor* ((Figure 32), who furthermore uses another frequent feature of self-irony. She uses annotations, tags and text signs that ironically comment on the self as, e.g., shown in one her videos, when she makes a self-ironic comment because she is singing and when reflecting on the video, she finds herself "too awake for 8:30 am" or in an example of Shane Dawson, who uses the annotations to make an ironic comment on his own physical appearance writing: thumps for my "hood-ness" lol".

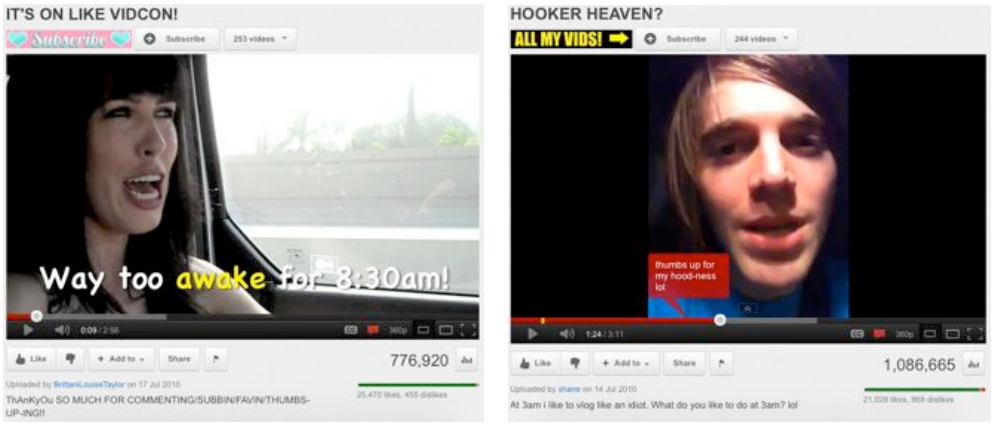


Figure 32: *Self-reflexivity through text signs and annotations*

10.7 The camera as a catalyst for anger

It has been argued that most of the Vlogs, and therein the personal Vlog, reflect upon joyful activities, which combine self-presentation with entertainment. But there are of course more serious examples of the personal Vlog that resemble earlier forms of Vlogging (cf. *Presentations of the Self on YouTube*). Within the sample, it is noticeable how some Vloggers use and interact with the camera as a punching bag. They simply use it to release anger, as in the videos of *CopperCab* and *drinkingwithbob*, who are literally screaming at the camera. Both examples also result in a much more negative and confrontational interaction with the users. This is the case especially in regards to *CopperCab*, who turns his anger towards his viewers. The mode also becomes less dialogical, as in the case with *drinkingwithbob*, who does not address his audience directly as people, but rather as an undefined public mass. This leaves little space for user-involvement and identification with him as a YouTuber among the audience. What also characterises *drinkingwithbob* is his age being a creator above 40. There are of course, exceptions, but a large majority of the Vloggers are creators under 30, who seem to have a somewhat different approach towards presenting the self in the YouTube Community (cf. *8.1, 8.7*). In another example, the video *Appeasing Islam* by *Patcondell* is a personal Vlog, but it differs from most of the personal Vlogs in terms of its lack of performance. It is a personal monologue of the creator's religious opinion that does not change its tone or facial gesture. In most of the personal Vlogs that are registered in this sample with a static monologue the presenter adopts a performing role i.e. facial and body gestures, and frequent change of tone in the voice. The presenter furthermore often takes on different both fictional and non-fictional roles that result in a much more dynamic and dialogical communicative situation than e.g. in the case of *Patcondell*. This, moreover, articulates the audience as e.g. in the videos of *CommunityChannel* or *meekakitty*. These performative roles that were found in the videos of *CommunityChannel* and *meekakitty* are clearly lacking in the videos made by older individuals registered in this sample.

It was argued in the article *Presentations of the self on YouTube* that there are many modes of activity, which can also be found in the traditional home movie, as investigated by Richard Chalfen (1987). Chalfen has also noted how some activities are generally absent in home movies, such as going to the toilet, static transportation scenes (driving and walking), just like watching television, talking on the telephone or being in the cinema are activities that in most cases are left out of the home movie (cf. Chalfen 1987, p. 62). But there are locations and activities which we repeatedly find in the content on YouTube (also see section *3.7*).

The standards of what topics are being presented in home movies have been extended on YouTube to include almost all types of everyday activities, such as driving, shopping, sleeping, waiting and going to

the toilet etc. and in that sense are less selective, although the YouTube videos depict the same idealised image of a happy family as in the home movie. This extension of recorded activities is partly explained by the increasing mobility and presence of the camera (as we always bring them along, i.e., cell phone cameras and iPhones) and the frequency of producing content, where more ordinary aspects of everyday behaviour are filmed. This increases the amount of footage significantly compared to home movies, where the camera is only turned on for special occasions (cf. Chalfen 1987, p. 62). Viewers are not interested in watching people buying toilet paper as an everyday activity, depicted from a neutral objective point of view. The necessity and consequence of making these recordings attractive for an audience is a mediated performative transformation of everyday activities into entertainment. The action of buying toilet paper on YouTube therefore in most cases does result in a performative act that appears somewhat staged, but at the same time taking place in real life.

This is also the starting point of looking more in depth with a few of the personal Vlogs, which in the following will include the videos of *The Shaytards*, *CTFxC* and *ShaneDawson* who are among the most popular Vloggers on YouTube, but also because these cases are representative examples that involve issues of identity formation, which includes most of the personal Vlogs found in this sample. Many Vlogs include the element of authenticity in regards to social performances as will be exemplified with *The Shaytards,* identity as a constructed and mediated performance, the articulation of YouTube as a community mirrored in the personal Vlog *CTFxC* (*11.2*), and finally how the personal Vlog, through the use of mediated intimacy, evokes a strong sense of authenticity, which will be discussed in respect to Shane Dawson's personal Vlog, *Shane (11.3*).

11 - Examples of the personal Vlog

11. 1 The *Shaytards* – a modern YouTube family

The Shaytards has already been mentioned several times in this dissertation, since it is one of the best illustrations of how an identity of a family is represented on YouTube. *The Shaytards* is also the most represented series of this sample, with 21 individual videos. In the following, I shall gather these findings in an overall analysis of *The Shaytards* in order to understand how a performance mediated version of everyday life presented in the Shaytards can be regarded as an authentic presentation of an online identity that ultimately can be said to be real. This involves what has been addressed as a performative paradox (cf. *The Performative way of YouTube*) in terms of how the presentation of the self on YouTube demands authenticity, but at the same time is inherently linked to do so in a performative and staged role of the self; but before returning to this, I shall briefly introduce *The Shaytards*.

11.1.2 Brief description of *The Shaytards*

The series is a personal Vlog series that follows the everyday life of a family who call themselves *The Shaytards*. The father of the family refers to himself as *Shaycarl* or just Shay and he does most of the filming and is the person we can consider the main social actor. The channel was initiated on October 2, 2008, when Shay started making daily videos of himself and his family and as of November 2011, he has produced more than 1000 videos. The series is a personal Vlog series, with a focus on the everyday life of a family living in Los Angeles. *The Shaytards* began as a personal weight-loss project[21], but quickly became a Vlog about Shay and the everyday lives of his wife and children, while the serious intention of losing weight has gradually been toned down. Each video contains a selection of the family's everyday life, with an average running time of approximately 13 minutes. The family members in *The Shaytards* have moreover been given names and introduced as characters with their character names in an introductory sequence similar to a television sitcom, where the wife is called MummyTard, the children called SonTard, PrincessTard, BabyTard and RockTard (who was born during the second year of the series).

Despite its obvious staging of characters, *The Shaytards* can be recognised as non-fiction. This is partly due to the style and settings of the series. Overall, *The Shaytards* presents us with a somewhat chaotic organisation of the content. This style moreover resembles a very raw home movie style in which traditional framing is often put aside, like when the camera is often out of focus and sometimes even filmed in the wrong format. Little of this seems to matter since it authenticates that this is actually filmed by an ordinary family and not professional producers or a film crew hired to follow a family like we see in reality television. In a similar way, no colour grading is used in the video nor any background music. As can be noticed in Figure 32, *The Shaytards* is filmed with a small pocket camera or an iPhone filming in front of a mirror:

[21] See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLvKz2LMRs8.

Figure 33: *A frequent Vlog camera (i.e. of a mini-handheld or a camera-phone)*

11.1.3 A performative paradox

The intro-sequence presents the individuals as characters in a television series, i.e., through still photos they are shown in different situations, which reveals them as social characters, accompanied by a thematic song and standard text signs showing their character names in the series. The intro-sequence seems to be an adaption of a television docu-soap, and it underlines that this is a staged version of a family's ordinary everyday life, which is furthermore underlined by the text in the song: "You are now watching the Shaytards Vlog (…) he puts his life online for you". The introduction makes it clear that this is a mediated version of everyday, where we are being presented for real persons with characters names.

Figure 34: *Introducing Shay as character*

The introduction also reminds viewers of the fact that everybody who participates in the videos is aware that they are being filmed and they therefore also react and perform accordingly. The introduction denotes that what we see is never a direct mirror of what takes place when the camera is not filming; it is a specific version of their reality that is performed for an audience, but nonetheless the characters simultaneously claim to be real people performing an online identity. This two-folded understanding of them, both as characters in a show as well as real people, articulates what in *The*

Performative Way of YouTube has been referred to as a "performative paradox". By claiming that they are not actors, but a real family, recording themselves and their real lives, they present themselves with the intention to be regarded as genuine, sincere people. According to Paddy Scannell, "sincerity presupposes, as its general condition, the absence of performance" (1996, p. 58). It could therefore be a fundamental paradox that *The Shaytards* present themselves as sincere people, while at the same time they do this in a highly performative and subjective manner. The paradox, however, presumes that sincerity in its purest form is a non-interfering and non-staged representation of reality. As argued earlier, a representation of reality is always a biased version of reality, just like Goffman also argues a subject is always performing a role, which is thus "an impression of reality" (cf. 1959, p. 28). And as *The Shaytards* clearly demonstrates, sincerity is, as Scannell also recognises, "a performative requirement" (1996, p. 58). Later in his book, Scannell elaborates on this as he argues that a role or an identity is very much linked and contextualised to the setting, for instance that a radio host is inherently linked to the radio studio: "To enter this place is to assume, for the duration, a role and identity appropriate to the particular communicative event that is being staged" (ibid., p. 140). The introduction of *The Shaytards* for example in a similar way does situate the characters in a communicative event, where viewers are reminded that this is an online mediated version of *The Shaytards*' reality.

The context that *The Shaytards* presents themselves in is thus inherently a mediated self-presentation that addresses an audience and thus doing this sincerely must involve a performance that articulates an audience. It is therefore the ability to provide a presentation of the self that the audience will judge as being authentic or non-authentic.

Besides the already mentioned aspect of the specific Vlog style, *The Shaytards* generates an impression of authenticity that makes us regard the family as both genuine and real. I argue this impression is generated through three aspects:

1) The ability to provide an impression of the selective and mediated version of the self as real or what can be identified as "controlled social performance" –resulting in a selective and idealised family portrait.

2) The ability to communicate transparency – which on YouTube in most cases takes place through self-reflexivity.

3) A fundamental identification with the social role of the presenter (including group identification and social status, i.e., authoritative role of the presenter).

11.1.4 Controlled performances

Creator control is an underlying feature of UGC (cf. *7.5*) and is most significantly found in the personal Vlog or other videos in which the creator and the presenter within the video are identical. Meyrowitz (1985) has argued that electronic media make politicians more vulnerable in public life, and supporting this argument, John B. Thompson has more recently argued that the Internet in a similar way has led to a communicative situation in which politicians are in less control and are more potentially vulnerable for exploitation (cf. 2005, p. 41). If we take a look at what is being shown in *The Shaytards*, it can be noted that on the contrary the family is in control of what members reveal of their lives, as they show only selective behaviour and scenes from their lives, and it can thus also be regarded as an example of "impression management". But their performative behaviour is also a consequence of satisfying an audience, who through viewing and subscriptions implicitly control them. Nevertheless, it can be noted how *The Shaytards,* together with the rest of the video creators in this sample, have chosen to only depict specific activities and patterns of behaviour. If *The Shaytards* chose to film something the

audience would not like, we can assume that viewers' direct access to responding would result in concrete negative reactions in terms of a decrease in views or rating. On the contrary, all of *The Shaytards*' videos (in this sample) have more than 95% "likes" (a statistic appearing underneath each video). It can therefore be assumed that the specific type of social behaviour and selected scenes of their everyday lives are acknowledged by the audience, which is also indicated by the fact that most of *The Shaytards*' videos are found within the top-rated and most viewed videos.

Graeme Turner has characterised contemporary reality television as a performance that is selective and orientated towards drama:

> That performance trends almost inevitable towards the excessive, the extraordinary and even the offensive as a means of attracting the attention of its audience (2010, p. 69).

Turner addresses how many series emphasise emotional drama and how conflicts seem to be the main drive. This takes place because the participants are *not* in control and they are performing in a context in which conflicts, drama and exaggerations are proportional to their status of celebrity. This is not the case with *The Shaytards*. There is rarely any drama, and conflicts are avoided and in most cases left out. This is because *The Shaytards* are in control of what is being presented and they are thus capable of leaving out any situation they do not like.

Jose van Dijck gives some insight into how idealised family portraits (the "nuclear family") are apparent in the home movies of the 1950s and were abandoned in the home movies of the 1970s (e.g., *An American Family*) and 1980s, and have been abandoned ever since (cf. 2005, pp. 28-29) – thus implying that contemporary audiovisual family portraits provide a more realistic depiction of everyday life. It is therefore interesting that what we witness, in *The Shaytards* and, with only a few exceptions, in all personal Vlogs, is an idealised version of family life, where dysfunctionality does not exist, as I will briefly exemplify with some illustrations of the idealised family images in the section below.

11.1.5 Happy times in *The Shaytards*

Since this sample was gathered during June-August, many videos in the sample reflect holiday activities (as they are videos produced in the US or Europe, where holidays occur at this time at year). This also includes some of the videos of *The Shaytards*, where the whole family is going on a camping trip (e.g., *MOTORCYCLE CAMPING!, WILL THEY REMEMBER?, CITY SLICKER CAMPING!,* and *WHAT WILL YOU BE DOING IN 10 YEARS?!*).

Other videos involve special occasions, such as birthdays (e.g., *HAPPY BIRTHDAY MOMMYTARD!, DUDE ALMOST BREAKS DIVING BOARD!* and *BIRTHDAY FOR A PRINCESS!*). These three videos all record the rituals of blowing out candles on a birthday cake and singing "Happy Birthday". In the videos, parents, grandparents as well as brothers and sisters are present and these activities are very similar to classic birthday home videos, e.g., described by Richard Chalfen (1987) or By Patricia Zimmerman (1995), as reinforcements of family values. Other examples of this can be seen in *HAPPY BIRTHDAY MOMMYTARD!,* where the family buys fireworks for the 4th of July. In *MOTORCYCLE CAMPING*!, everybody is roasting marshmallows and in *CITY SLICKER CAMPING!* they are sitting around a camp-fire playing the guitar.

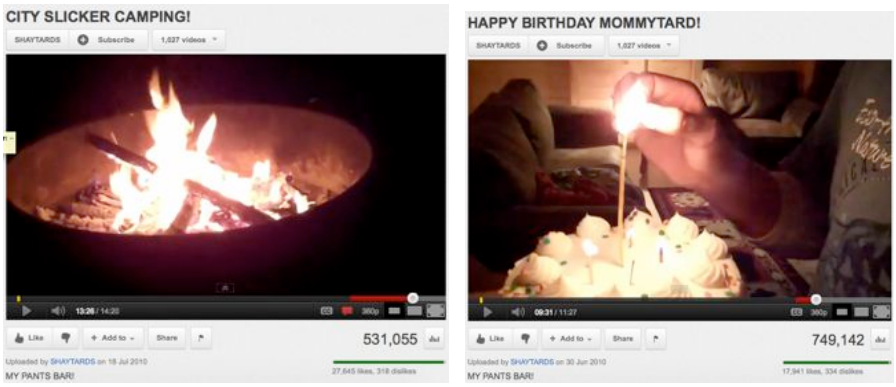


Figure 35: *Ritual home movie activities*

Overall, we witness happy and joyful versions of everyday life stripped of any conflicts or potential tension. *The Shaytards* videos are also quite similar to traditional home movie in their choice of themes being reflected on the positive aspects of family relations, analogous to Richard Chalfen's description of home movies that primarily have "an emphasis on creating pleasure and being entertained (…) viewers should be able to repeat and re-experience these pleasurable times" (1987, pp. 138-39). These memories, however, in regards to YouTube, are public shared memories rather than private. Unlike the traditional home movies that also function as shared memories, in which viewers in most cases were participants or have a personal relationship to the creator, *The Shaytards'* videos are made for an online public audience, where the depiction of idealised behaviour is also a form of filter, which excludes more serious matters such as arguments and the children being sad or angry.

In mainstream commercials, people are steered toward "idealized images" of families and everyday activities (cf. Buckingham et al. 2011, p. 18), as the intention is to sell a product. In a similar way, *The Shaytards* presents themselves as a product that they need to sell in terms of views, subscribers and user-involvement and following this logic, it also makes sense to present an idealised image as they are the direct seller of their product. But as also argued, this is contextualised by the performative paradox of presenting the idealised image that is performative and mediated as an impression of authenticity, which audiences first and foremost accept as part of the mediated context, of which the idealised image is also apart.

One important aspect of this is to understand authenticity as the ability to present their lives as authentic. One approach to doing this is to show and describe that what the family offers is their mediated version of life that we should enjoy; it is therefore what it says it is, which makes it true to itself and thus authentic, as we therefore can not claim Shay for being "non"-authentic or not fulfilling his promises. But why do people prefer to see this version of their lives instead of a version with conflicts and drama?

One reason is perhaps that viewers are invited to build a stronger relationship with the videos they are watching. There is no institutional interference that distances us, and as argued in *10.2*, the specific aesthetic of the Vlog and its direct approach fosters an impression of intimacy. *The Shaytards* addresses its audience directly, and it invites them to share and re-experience their own memories as a kind of emotional nostalgia.

Consider the video *BEARDED MAN ON A ROPE!* This video is referred to by many viewers as one of the best videos of *The Shaytards*. The video is a traditional holiday home video, where the whole

family is going to a water park. Shay has brought a waterproof camera for his viewers, so they can be part of it as well. Overall the video shows the family having a great time, filmed as a traditional holiday home movie, with the children playing and having fun. Through this happy portrait of the family Shay is implicitly also presenting himself as a parent, a kind of father figure that many of the viewers identity with, and signal some belongingness with, as can be seen in some of the written comments:

- the shaytards vlog always make there famiy full of excitment and it makes me want to be in there fmily or atleast meet them:)
- Awww Shay!! This episode is the kinda day you wanna look back on as a memory and makes life worth living. I'm 19 and I hope when I'm 30 I'm able to make memories with family like this. You guys are a great inspiration on how life should be. Be very proud of yourselves and know that even though some of us have never met you, you and your family are role models. Love You Guys!!!
- wen i grow up i want to be the same type of father/husband like shay....having fun with my family and making sure they are all happy and safe
- Aww Shay. You remind me so much of my dad. You both have the same personalities and the same priority. I wish my dad was here. :) You make me soo happy, Shay. Thank you to you and your family. :) I hope I can be a great mom like Katilette and hope to have a GREAT father like you Shay. And some day to have wonderful kids just like yours. :)
- This is seriously my FAVORITE vlog of the ShayTards EVER. Makes me miss the summer, makes me miss being a kid, makes me miss having family vacations like this. Thanks for sharing this...really made me feel like I was there. Love The ShayTards!

Figure 36: *Viewers identification with The Shaytards*

An interesting thing about the comments above is that they do not necessarily regard *The Shaytards* as how life really is, but rather how life *should* be, as literally stated in the second comment: "You guys are a great inspiration on how life should be". This implies that the video evokes a memorised idea of everyday life based on the audiences' own experiences. It is furthermore reflected in the comments that viewers identify with a shared collective memory. This articulates the presence of a "significant other" (cf. *8.10*), where viewers feel important and more personally connected, e.g., illustrated by the use of the personal and direct approach with Shay (e.g., "Aww Shay!,"), where one viewer mirrors his own father and another "wants to be in there family" (first comment).

In most situations involving *The Shaytards*, Shay takes on what Goffman refers to as a public "front-role" (1959, p. 114) (also see *The Performative Way of YouTube*), presenting himself through his role as a Vlogger. Thus, he addresses an audience, revealing an explicit performative and entertaining public part of himself. This front-region role also includes the children, who are part of the series and therefore also to some extent take part in the performative behaviour altered by the camera. But at the same time, the family is also a real family that necessarily includes involving the roles of authoritative parents and disobeying children, which includes what Goffman addresses as "back-region" roles. In such situations, Shay and his wife most likely take on a somewhat different role as parents that includes restrictions, such as telling them to go to bed or to do their homework. But we do not see this, as Shay in most cases has made a selection of activities and roles in which the family is presenting itself in a more

performative public front-role. This, however, entails the performative paradox of sincerity, where *The Shaytards* declares that what we see is in fact their real lives and all social behaviour can therefore not be purely public, as proposed by Goffman. It is instead an example of the mediated social performance, which Joshua Meyrowitz identifies as "Middle Region space" (1985, p. 47), which is the interplay of public front region behaviour, but at the same time a "side-stage view" of private back-region. The principle of involving a self-reflexive layer in the film automatically provides most Vlogs with a Middle Region that is constantly mixing two distinctive modes of presentation and representation. Since *The Shaytards* is ultimately in control of what takes place, the Middle Region is controlled and thus also staged by the performer unlike the situations that Meyrowitz describes, e.g., in regards to politicians, "where damaging backstage information can escape" (ibid, p. 49). Shay edits and selects the content and in principle very little damaging information is given to the viewers. But, there are, however, examples of how the attempted controlled performative behaviour is interrupted.

A good example of this change of role is evident in the video *FIGHTING WITH MY WIFE ABOUT POOLS IN WALMART! (5/15/10-429 PART 1),* where the family is in Wal-Mart, and Shay wants to buy a pool, while MummyTard disagrees. In this situation, the performing role as MummyTard does not let her sincere disagreement be taken seriously (as she in the previous scene has been imitating Michael Jackson, dancing in front of the camera). She takes on a back-region role as a mother, arguing it is dangerous to have a pool in the backyard, while Shay attempts to joke about it. But MummyTard's more serious back-region role conflicts with Shay's funny and performative front-region role and his insistence on filming the situation conflict with Mummytards' role, which thus becomes an example of what Goffman refers to as a "communication out of character" (1959, p. 166 pp.) in terms of providing the aforementioned idealised family portrait. Perhaps for the same reason, the Vlog ends without filming the decision and we return to the issue in the following video, *JUMPING OUT OF WINDOWS! (5/15/10-429 PART 2),* where they have discussed the subject off camera and made a decision that allows them to reflect on; and already in the first frame, we see a picture of Shay laughing, thereby dismantling the seriousness of the previous video.

11.1.6 A mediated reality

But in most cases, *The Shaytards* demonstrates a mode of Middle Region that extends Meyrowitz' original understanding of Middle Region. In *The Shaytards*, the representation of reality and the performative and subjective presentation of this reality merges, where real people become characters and vice versa and private back-region behaviour is already mediated. Perhaps the most noticeable example of this is the video *BIRTHDAY FOR A PRINCESS! (5/2/10-418*), in which the whole family is celebrating PrincessTard's birthday. The different family members are not there to celebrate PrincessTard's birthday, but to celebrate the person behind PrincessTard. PrincessTard is not performing in the staged birthday party; she reacts authentically, as we believe it is actually her birthday and not her character's birthday. But the birthday party is highly mediated, not only by the presence of the camera that records everything, but also in terms of how it seems like this mediated activity would take place despite of the camera (i.e., even if it had been turned off), which is noticeable in terms of how the traditional birthday cake does not say her real name, but her character name: PrincessTard! as shown in the figure below:

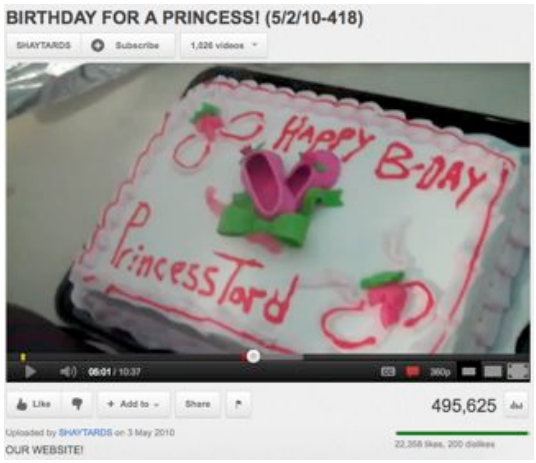


Figure 37: *PrincessTard's birthday cake*

By writing "PrincessTard" on the cake and in the following scene where the whole family is singing "Happy Birthday *PrincessTard*", the scenes illustrate a mediated version of reality, in which we are not only allowed a view into a private back-region that becomes public, but a private back-region that is already intended to be public. The private back-region within *The Shaytards* exists as an already mediated and thus performative back-region mode that is presented for us as an authentic presentation of real life. This distinguishes a personal Vlog like *The Shaytards* from previous examples of Middle-Region behaviour that can be registered in, e.g., contemporary reality television, not least because this takes place in presented reality and not in the hands of a camera crew or a director who dramatises or stages reality in post-production. In this scene, the camera basically only observes the reality that is mediated in front of us. But how can viewers accept this somewhat bizarre mediated version of a family's everyday life as authentic?

Perhaps the most obvious explanation is because Shay tells us that this is their mediated and selective version of reality. He both plays a performative version of himself, while at the same time demonstrating this, e.g., by showing how he edits the videos. And by using self-reflexive comments on his role as a performer, he situates himself in the pro-filmic reality outside the discourse of his videos. In all of the 21 *The Shaytards* videos registered in this sample, there is a self-reflexive and meta-commenting layer that draws attention to Shay's status as a Vlogger and that we are watching an audiovisual construction and representation of a family playing social characters in an online series, and the video becomes an example of Middle Region space. An example of this is in the video *WELCOME TO THE VORTEX!,* where Shay is watching an earlier video of *The Shaytards* together with his son, while he is also reading the comments aloud as he says: "You are watching The Shaytards watching the Shaytards" (5:17). At the same time, the old comments are once again being commented on in the present video, which highlights the constant reflection of the presence of YouTube as media platform and on the creator's role as a real person creating videos and an online version of himself.

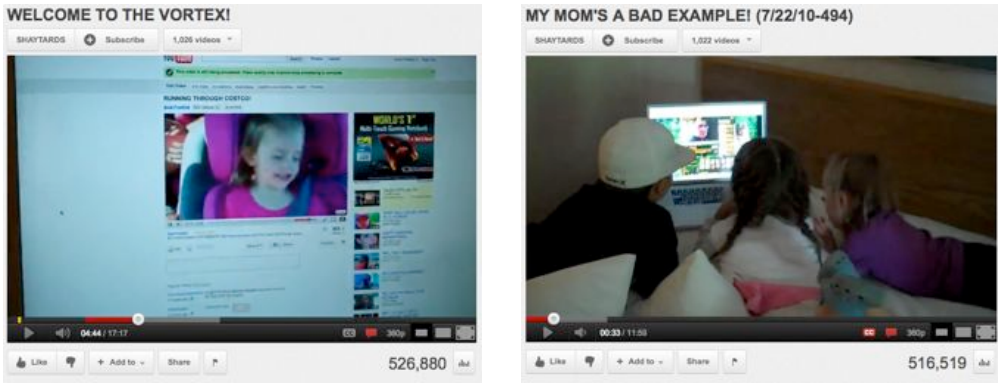


Figure 38: *The Shaytards watching the Shaytards*

The effect of this is twofold. On the one hand, it situates us in a here-and-now, where Shay is presenting himself in an Austinan sense, a performative action where things happen because of the camera and where the camera becomes the catalyst of the activities that go on (cf. *The Performative Way of YouTube*), which I shall elaborate on in the next chapter. On the other hand, it explicates the reality in juxtaposition with the presentation of the self, where viewers become part of both a mediated performative role that Shay is playing for his audience, while at the same time he tells viewers that this is a role he is playing as part of his profession and identity as a Vlogger. This self-reflexive layer thus adds another dimension to the impression of authenticity; viewers are constantly reminded they are watching YouTube and the fact that Shay is filming and creating a version of himself that also exists in reality. *The Shaytards* thus also communicates transparency towards their viewers by reminding them that nothing is being hidden from them.

11.1.8 Para-social interaction

Joshua Meyrowitz reflects upon the relationship between the viewers and the people they are watching on television as "media friends". Drawing on Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (2006/1956) ,who use the term "para-social interaction", Meyrowitz explains how viewers feel they know the people they meet on television or on YouTube. This is something that can also be noticed with *The Shaytards* as a form of interaction that Meyrowitz refers to as "intimacy with millions" (1985, p. 119). This aspect also reveals that performers like *The Shaytards* are not only judged by their performing skills, but just as much on their personalities, where they primarily need to be liked and fascinating at the same time – resembling off-line friendships (ibid, p. 119). On television, this relationship has traditionally resulted in a more distanced relationship with the viewers, who could not be reached by the performer in the same way as on YouTube. YouTube as a media platform allows viewers to create an even more intimate "para-social interaction" between them and the creators, because they can make instant responses to the video and thereby even strengthen the interaction. As argued in the beginning of this analysis, the direct communication between creators and audiences is a result of the use of the first-person camera, where viewers are directly addressed. This can also explain how viewers experience a more personal connection with the presenter, whom they feel is personally addressing them. YouTube's unrestricted accessibility (cf. *7.5.1*) enables users to respond and interact, e.g., through comments or video responding, creating a semi-dialogical mediated communicative situation.

An interesting aspect of this also is apparent in the video *Birthday for a Princess*, where Shay accidentally says SonTard's real name, which results in a large ethical discussion among the viewers. This discussion at the same time demonstrates differences between viewers, where it is noticeable how some of the viewers feel they know *The Shaytards* better than other fans:

Figure 39: *Comments by "True" and less true Shaytards fans*

Many comments related to this specific topic reveal how on YouTube it is fully acceptable that the family plays specific roles and hide their names. As illustrated in the comments above, any attempt to reveal the real names of *The Shaytards* is quickly followed by comments that react negatively to comments which suggest wanting to know their real names. There are many of these examples, where users claim to be real Shaytards fans and react negatively when people attempt to expose what the "real" fans regard as a respect for privacy, where such actions as telling their real names are a violation of the social norms and unspoken contract between *The Shaytards* and their viewers.

This also illustrates, what has been pointed out by Horton and Wohl in regards to the para-social relationship between the fan and the public person ("persona"):

> In time, the devotee – the "fan" – comes to believe that he "knows" the persona more intimately and profoundly than others do; that he "understands" his character and appreciates his values and motives (1956, p. 216).

Many of the comments above address the status of a "true fan" as one who knows their real names, but will never tell, while "untrue" fans ask the questions or tell and the "true fans" by this difference thus indicate they understand the Shaytards much better than other fans.

The viewers claiming to be true fans have also accepted the conditions of the series, i.e., *The Shaytards* perform as social characters in a show, and therefore respond negatively to other viewers who draw attention to the distinction between the persons in real life and within the series. This also shows how

some fans distinguish themselves from fans who do not understand the unwritten rules of the series, and by claiming more initiated knowledge of the universe of the series, they also strengthen their social ties with *The Shaytards* in comparison to other viewers who do not "understand" the series.

This gap, between so-called "real" fans and viewers who are not, is perhaps also a description of how some viewers regard themselves; as the "significant other", i.e., those, who according to themselves have stronger and more important relationships with *The Shaytards*. There is furthermore an overall distinction in terms of intimacy that is identified by users who for instance engage in comment writing and consider themselves as the significant other, experiencing that Shay talks directly to them and responding accordingly as demonstrated above.

11.1.9 Performing different roles

A final aspect of *The Shaytards* is the role of authority that they adopt and authenticate through the YouTube Community. What authenticates this mediated reality is not only transparency through self-reflection and contextual agreement, but just as much the social status and social role Shay takes on in regards to his audience and due to how YouTube allows people to communicate in a more direct mode.

Meyrowitz (1985, 1994) regards social roles as a "triad" of three distinctive roles. This entails "roles of being" (group identity), "roles of transition" and "roles of authority". According to Meyrowitz, individuals adopt all three roles at once, but with different emphasis (1985, p. 52). Although Meyrowitz describes three very general roles, they can perhaps also elaborate on how we can understand the relationship between the creators, the viewers and YouTube as a community that is built on a shared group identity. Within the group, users also have different social roles that involve being in transition, as some users strive to become YouTube celebrities and YouTube Partners, while the large group of partners that accounts for most of the examples in this sample, belong to a group of the most popular YouTubers. I will therefore primarily be focusing on the role of authority and the shared roles of group identity, analogous to what we can regard as belonging to the aforementioned YouTube Community (cf. *8.1, 8.7*) which also authenticates and provides individuals with a role of authority.

In the previous chapters, we touched upon how YouTube can be considered an example of popular culture, but whereas non-UGC such as Music Videos and Television Highlights reflect upon a widespread mass-media culture. UGC, on the other hand, could be characterised as more limited to what we consider a specific YouTube popular sphere that is known by users who consume a varied spectre of popular YouTubers, and that can be identified, e.g., in the video comments. However, for others, including most people over 30, the popular sphere of YouTube is unknown territory, as they in many cases use YouTube as a media archive involving all types of content. But for the consisting and quite large audience that subscribes and consumes YouTube as regular streaming, the YouTube community represents a shared space of belongingness or what Meyrowitz might term a basic mode of "group identity" (1985, p. 53). According to Meyrowitz, what characterises the group identity is "the need for shared yet special experience" (ibid., p. 54) and that is exactly what the YouTube community provides for its regular users and not the least creators. They are part of a very large shared community that is special, because they are constantly addressed in an intimate one-to-one communicative situation, but also because e.g. intertextual and initiated knowledge about the content is often required, as many of the Vlog series are on-going, with several hundreds of videos. Thus, dedicated fans, or as in the case of *The Shaytards* "true fans", have more specific knowledge about the Vloggers than "first time viewers".

11.1.10 The YouTube community as an authority

YouTube functions as an institution in terms of how it is regarded as an undefined community. Thus, belongingness authenticates you as a Vlogger, because the success of, e.g., *The Shaytards* ultimately depends on the YouTube community and its users. *The Shaytards* are famous and successful because of their audience. Unlike many television programmes, most YouTubers' are not casted or famous on YouTube because somebody else made them famous. And unlike many reality stars, who became famous for participating in a show and thus got a spin-off show due to their celebrity status, the YouTubers in most cases earned their social status within the community and started out with only a few hundreds viewers. In that sense, they were born out of the community, which perhaps can also explain how the now world-famous pop-start Justin Bieber used social network sites to build his career as being part of a shared community that made him visible. It is therefore much more difficult for already established celebrities such as, e.g., Oprah Winfrey, to authenticate themselves on YouTube. Oprah, according to Burgess and Green (2009, pp. 91), never managed to become an accepted member of the YouTube community, she was not authenticated and identified as YouTube and therefore nobody went to her channel. The community therefore very much authenticates you as a YouTuber, which also implicitly means that YouTubers need to learn and apply the social norms of the community (e.g., user-involvement, transparency, self-reflection or the communication of ordinariness; cf. *10.2*) and which are ultimately elements that authenticate, e.g., *The Shaytards*. This also makes it difficult to be distributed to platforms other than YouTube.

This aspect is also addressed by a viewer in a comment written for the video *JUMPING OUT OF WINDOWS! (5/15/10-429 PART 2)*:

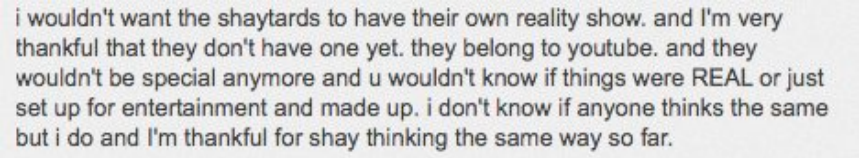


Figure 40: *Viewer comment on The Shaytards being authentic*

The Shaytards is not regarded as a reality show by this viewer, who sees them as much more authentic than reality television. As he or she states, *The Shaytards* belong to YouTube; that is what makes them special and real. Belonging to YouTube is associated with being "real", and in that way this intimacy being emphasised in the comment is provided by YouTube (and herein the slogan: Broadcast Yourself!). To address the YouTube community is a mode of identification with the natural settings of the site, which thus authenticates you as belonging to the group with a shared understanding of what constitutes YouTube. This at the same time strengthens the spectator's sense of belonging as well, when being addressed directly and identified as an example of para-social interaction, which also reveals group identity.

11.1.11 Vlogging as an authoritative profession

Many viewers and fans address this community, but it is important to stress that this does not necessarily entail that all participants are part of the same social group or have the same social status. It is possible to consider the act of Vlogging as a confirmation of a specific social status that is expressed in addressing YouTube as a community, e.g., Shay is authoritative on YouTube in terms of his performative skills of YouTubing.

In the video *CRAZY HUGE WATERSLIDE*!, Shay is reflecting on the influence of YouTube as a community, as he experienced at the recent *Vidcon* conference for the most popular YouTubers. He says:

> We are all in this together; if one of us succeeds all of us succeed. Literally because we are just a small group of people, you know. We could be a thousand people. A thousand YouTubers, making consisting content online and it's huge (10:30).

As Shay is implying, he considers himself as part of a group or an online community, where everybody knows each other. This is underlined in the many cameos and references to other YouTubers which can be found within *The Shaytards'* videos, and even more explicitly in the videos of *CTFxC*, to whom I shall return to in the next chapter. But what Shay is also saying is that this group does not include everybody. Without addressing it directly, he refers to the around one thousand YouTubers who have a different status than other YouTubers. Shay belongs to this group, consisting of the most popular YouTubers, who all are YouTube Partners with hundreds of thousands viewers and thousands of comment writers. This excludes the majority of YouTube creators who take part in much smaller niche-defined groups that also belong to a YouTube community, but a somewhat different and less visible community with which Shay identifies himself. In *CRAZY HUGE WATERSLIDE*!, a viewer makes a comment that comprehensively captures this differentiation among YouTubers. In the comment, the viewer addresses Shay as a Vlogger belonging to a certain group of YouTubers similar to the different social statuses of fractions and cliques in high school:

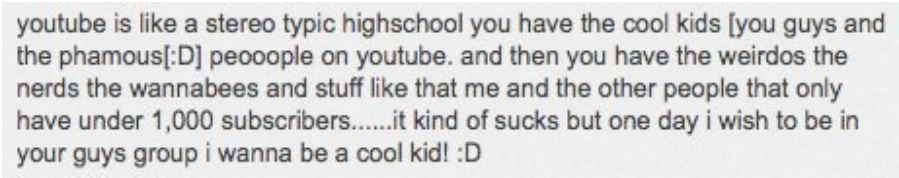

youtube is like a stereo typic highschool you have the cool kids [you guys and the phamous[:D] peooople on youtube. and then you have the weirdos the nerds the wannabees and stuff like that me and the other people that only have under 1,000 subscribers.....it kind of sucks but one day i wish to be in your guys group i wanna be a cool kid! :D

Figure 41: *Comment from the video CRAZY HUGE WATERSLIDE*

Popularity, as understood in this comment, is literally linked to visibility, but also implicitly analogous to personality, where being cool on YouTube, according to this viewer, is to have more than 1,000 subscribers, and as written in the comment: "I wish to be in your guys group I wanna be a cool kid!" This also illustrates the existence, on YouTube, of different social classes of creators of UGC based on visibility (cf. *8.9*). Thus, being a YouTube partner like Shay is an identity that is defined by the social status of belonging to the group of cool YouTubers. In a simplistic way, this status can be illustrated by whether or not a YouTuber is invited to perform on *Vidcon*, like many of the YouTubers represented in this sample, since this includes the 500 most popular YouTubers. When Scrolling down the comments related to *The Shaytards*' videos, there is a general acceptance of Shay's different social status, since most of the viewers writing comments consent to the fact that Shay is earning money from making videos. Shay is equivalently open about his social status, as well as the fact that he is earning quite lot of money; but as argued above, by reflecting on his status and not trying to hide the fact that he is earning money, also makes it acceptable among his viewers. It has not been possible to find any critical comment addressing this specific issue (although some viewers dislike the videos and find it difficult to understand that Vlogging is actually a job). Most of the comments are like the one below, acknowledgments of his status as a YouTube Partner:

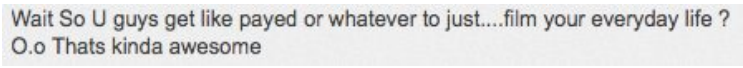


Figure 42: *Acknowledgment of YouTube partner status*

The video *CITY SLICKER CAMPING!* begins with Shay and his wife entering a hotel room, and he immediately starts to explain that the reason they are in the hotel is because they need to upload the video, while actually camping with MummyTard's family. But since there is no Internet where they are camping, they need to find a hotel. Shay reflects upon his role as a Vlogger and his addiction to the Internet, but at the same time he is well aware of his identity as a Vlogger, as he says:

> "This almost starts to sound pathetic, but this is our job, our life, this is what we do" (01:05)

They also ironically address the viewers as their employer at the same time:

> "Because of uploading videos, we can't go camping, we have to find a hotel. You should give us like four days off" (2:45)

This issue is also addressed in some of the comments:

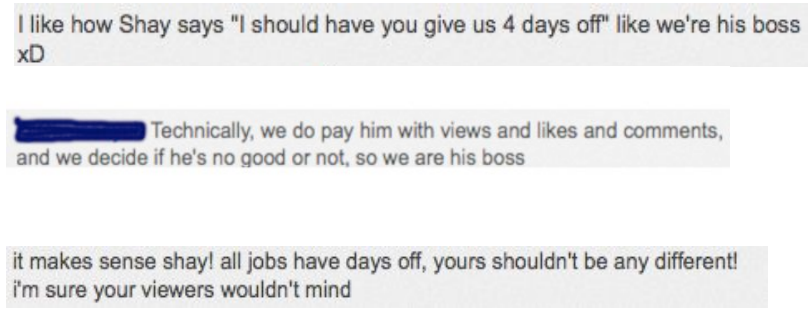


Figure 43: *Comment reflections on Vlogging as a job*

The statements by Shay and his wife as well as the comments in Figure 42 illustrate a shared understanding of their roles and identities as YouTube Vloggers who provide the Internet with aspects of their private lives and entertaining their viewers. They acknowledge this role, just like they are fully aware that *The Shaytards* are getting paid based on their ability to direct traffic towards their channel.

One final aspect is the changing character of the authoritative role. According to Meyrowitz, the authoritative role "depends on the denial of existence of a back-stage" (ibid. 66). *The Shaytards* is a paradoxical example of this because he receives his authoritative role by mastering the presentation of the self in a controlled Middle-Region space, which includes revealing mediated back-region behaviour. But by creating and staging this Middle-Region space, which is established when he gives his family members character names and explicitly performs in front of the camera, Shay thereby excludes any deep-back stage behaviour that perhaps also indicates a change of behaviour within authoritative roles on YouTube. To be authoritative on YouTube means to be visible. It does not necessarily involve a traditional striving for objectivity (like journalists) or ethical correctness (such as politicians) or to communicate in an explicitly didactic form. On the contrary, Shay seems to build his authority around

self-irony (e.g., constantly joking about being a bad father) and thereby maintaining a distance towards traditional private back-region behaviour. This specific and controlled performative behaviour is an example of Middle-Region behaviour, but it is also an expression of being conscious about what the audience wants. Hence, it is a consequence of the need for visibility that defines the criteria of the performative, turning the video into a performative mode of efficiency where *The Shaytards* receives performance-based payment. In that sense, Shay's performance skills are validated and acknowledged in terms of visibility; the traffic he manages to attract to his channel. Performance thus becomes a skill, also touched upon by Jon McKenzie (2001), as argued in *The Performative Way of YouTube*, where authority is gained by adopting the skills of performing with an impression of authenticity.

11.1.12 Summing up

This analysis of *The Shaytards* has been concerned with the presentation of a mediated online identity of a family that can be regarded as real despite that they are controlling and selecting what the audience can see and thus presenting a specific version of their lives, where even back-stage behaviour seem staged. This version of reality is nonetheless regarded as an authentic version of reality, because their videos are contextualised in the YouTube community in terms of the low-grade Vlog style, but just as much through their mediated personal relationships with their viewers, while through self-reflexivity furthermore they continuously link the performative self-presentation to real life.

Finally, they have also established themselves within the YouTube community as authoritative Vloggers, where their profession legitimates performative behaviour and their social status thus also authenticates them as real people with an identity and profession as Vloggers.

11.2 The personal Vlog of *CTFxC* – an act of doing

In *The Shaytards*, the focus was on the social performances and the different modes of acting in front of the camera. In a slightly similar series called *CTFxC* (*Charles Trippy Family Core*), we find many parallel examples of social performances. But the series is also an example of how the presence of the camera not only effects the social behaviour of the participants in the videos, but also how it shapes the actions taking place and thus illustrates what can be considered a concrete example of a performative act or "an act of doing", as proposed by J. L Austin (1975) and Judith Butler (1993) (cf. *The Performative Way of YouTube*). I will elaborate on this aspect and furthermore argue how meaning is generated through interaction, between creators, audiences and the world of the text, in this case the video. It moreover involves aspects of whether we can regard *CTFxC* as a construction of reality as discussed earlier in relationship to a constructivist approach (cf. *4.10.1*).

CTFxC is a personal Vlog about the everyday life of the YouTubers and celebrities Charles Trippy and his wife Alli. We also meet their families and their two dogs, who frequently appear in their videos. *CTFxC*, as of November 30, 2011, has uploaded more than 900 videos and the channel has 565,000 subscribers. *CTFxC* is represented in this sample with 12 videos. Just like *The Shaytards*, Charles edits and uploads the videos himself and what we see therefore are always joyful and funny moments. Charles and Allie are also performing in front of the camera, e.g., making funny faces, but their performances appear much more toned down and their behaviour less staged. At the same time, however, we never see them kiss or act intimate as a couple. This also underlines that their Vlog is not about emotional exploration, either positive or negative. Besides the fact that it would most likely not be entertaining to watch, an intimate depiction of their relationship would simultaneously exclude audience involvement. On the contrary, *CTFxC*, unlike *The Shaytards*, constantly embeds user involvement, both in terms of competitions addressing written comments, but also because the audience sometimes has a direct impact on the actual content.

11.2.1 Performance and sincerity

This aspect can be illustrated in the video *HOTTEST F%#KING SAUCE!! (7.21.10 - Day 447)*. In this video, Alli is filming Charles eating some hot sauce, while she tells him not to eat too much. At the same time, she shows awareness of the audience, as she turns the camera towards herself – addressing the audience directly, and she ironically anticipates what they will write in the comments: "For everyone in the comments, go ahead right now, because I know you are gonna do it to me – PUSSY!" (06:58). In that sense, the audience becomes directly addressed as equal participants in what is going on. And just after Alli has told Charles not to eat more and goes to bed, Charles turns on the camera, creating an intimate situation between him and the audience. The scene also results in the visual expression of a performance as he eats some more sauce, which is an action accentuated by the presence of the camera. In that sense, what is presented in front of us is a representation of the reality that we identify in terms of their domestic settings and physical presence, but it is at the same time an example of a re-presented reality where the very act of filming creates activities taking place in front of the camera and becomes actions that would not take place otherwise.

Figure 44: *Charles eating sauce in the company of his viewers*

This characterises many of the actions taking place in front of the camera as performative utterances analogous to how J. L. Austin (1975), in *How to do things with words*, argues that the very saying of an utterance defines it as an action:

> (…) the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as, or as 'just', saying something (p. 5).

As also argued in *The Performative Way of YouTube*, if we transfer this utterance to the act of Vlogging, the fundamental act of turning on the camera and starting to record initiates a chain of actions taking place caused by the camera. Hence the camera performs what takes place in front of us. According to Austin, a performative utterance is not concerned with speaking the truth, but with the succeeding intended action or what he refers to as the distinction between "felicitous" and "infelicitous". An infelicity is a failed performative, which Austin juxtaposes with insincerity (ibid, p. 4) as he shows: "for example when I say 'I promise but not intend to promise'" (ibid, p. 25). On the other hand, to perform the action is also to be sincere. It is rather abstract to transfer Austin's linguistic philosophy on performatives to the videos of YouTube, and I shall not attempt to apply further distinctions of different performative utterances; but if we again concretely look at the video *HOTTEST F%#KING SAUCE!! (7.21.10 - Day 447)*, the distinction between what we identify as "felicitous" and "infelicitous" actions can perhaps also simplify how a basic mode of authenticity is at stake. Charles is about to eat the sauce, but before this he says: "All right I am gonna do it, I am gonna try the hottest fucking sauce today, I was hoping you guys were forgetting it, but a lot of people in the comments were like: *You better do the hot sauce, you wimp*" (03:50-4:20). Here Charles exemplifies the performative both orally by saying "I will do it" as a performative commitment to his audience of eating the sauce and not the least to film it, which in this case becomes the authentication of the performative utterance. Without the camera, the action would not be authenticated. If Charles had cut out the scene, just as he was about to eat the sauce, it would still be potentially sincere (as we could trust what he says), but without the visualisation of the performative utterance, most viewers would likely find it non-authentic. This occurs in another video from the sample. The video *I went sky diving!* by *meekakitty*, is also a personal Vlog in which the Vlogger tells about her recent sky diving experience, which she also recorded. The actual skydiving video is also on YouTube, but she has chosen to make it private. This has resulted in many negative comments, where most people ask her why and some even state they feel cheated and claim that it is lie and she as well is a "fake", which thus underlines that people can present themselves as sincere, but it is the visual presentation that authenticates you. Of course, this is first and foremost a description of simple visual documentation that evokes an impression of authenticity found in all visual texts of non-fiction, but at the same time it is also a demonstration of how the mediated staged reality

becomes real in the case of *CTFxC*, because Charles is regarded as a real person. In other words, the audience accepts the presented world of Charles and Alli as real because they visually present an everyday version of themselves that provides us with the impression of authenticity.

Another example is a scene in the video *BOOGER FLAVOR JELLYBEAN!! (7.25.10 - Day 451)*, where Alli pushes Charles in the pool, but it turns out to be a somewhat staged joke that lets Charles demonstrate his new water-proof camera. And in that sense, it becomes a product placement of a commodity that could challenge the idea of authenticity, as we are being told we are watching the everyday life of a couple and not a hidden commercial for a camera. The interesting thing is that the scene, however, is not considered a commercial or something fake, as we can see below in the comments, but rather fun and something positive:

- lmao i was tricked when alli pushed him in the pool XD
- loved when alli pushed charles into the pool
- you guys got me when alii pushed you in the pool i was like WTF!!!
- I almost had a heart attack when charles fell in the pool with the camera.

Figure 45: *positive reactions towards demonstration of a camera*

Besides the fact that the scene might be real, another explanation is perhaps because the audience becomes a part of the scene. In a classic situation of suspense, we see Alli sneaks up on Charles, while she indicates to the audience they need to be quiet as she is just about to push Charles in the pool. The situation is a classic almost ritual sketch that we automatically become invited to participate in, and we know, unlike Charles, what is going to happen. In that way, even though Charles was expecting to be pushed into the water, he is sincerely surprised, also underlined by how the tone of his voice changes as he is being pushed, and we thus witness he is not aware that Alli is behind him as shown in the picture below:

Figure 46: *An example of suspense*

11.2.2 A construction of reality?

As also mentioned in *The Performative Way of YouTube,* Austin's (1975) theory of the performative was adapted and revisited by Derrida (1988) and later by Butler (2006/1990). In order not to repeat what has already been written in the article, I shall only briefly present them here. For Derrida, the performative statement's principal function is its "iterability", that is, its inherent quotation of already existing utterances. This is also applied by Butler, who uses the repetitive significance of performativity to explain and illustrate the existence of hegemonic and conventional conditions of society (cf. Butler 1993, p. 225). Both Derrida and Butler, in this context, ultimately see identity as a construction of reality, supporting Stuart Hall's concept of identity as a discourse (cf. *8.10*) When Charles and Alli travel to Jamaica to film their holiday, this only takes place because of the performative role they take on as Vloggers. This role demands they film and in that sense, the role and identity as a Vlogger constructs the representation of reality that Charles and Alli choose to show us, just like the act of selecting what content to publish turns the video into a construction of reality. But as argued several times throughout this dissertation, this does not turn their experience into fiction. What Charles and Alli present for us is regarded and consumed as real. But what also challenges this constructivist aspect is the identification of the personal Vlog as an example of self-reflexive expressiveness, where Vloggers by communicating transparency demonstrate the existence of both a representation of reality and the a presentation of reality being performed. Charles and Ally do not hide the presence and alteration of the camera. They constantly reflect upon its presence and that fact that the video is a constructed representation of reality. This self-reflexive layer links the presentation of the self with reality, a mode of Middle-Region space, where the video as a constructed version of reality is bridged to the pro-filmic reality, which provides the series with authenticity stressing that Charles and Alli are not hiding the fact they construct a specific version of reality.

11.2.3 Identity as a dialogical process

The direct involvement and interaction with the users also challenges the idea of the constructed reality as a fiction. This involvement demonstrates that meaning is just as much created within the process of creating and consuming content. In the video *HOTTEST F%#KING SAUCE!! (7.21.10 - Day 447)*, it is revealed that the Vlog is not solely improvisation or something that take place in the moment, but it also reflects on user interactions from previous videos. This can be noticed in *HOTTEST F%#KING SAUCE!! (7.21.10 - Day 447)*, when Charles states: "I am gonna go get a haircut, because you guys were saying I was starting to look a little bit on the hobo-side, so I shaved my beard and am getting a haircut" (00:55-01:20).

Figure 47: *Charles is getting a haircut*

Charles might have cut his hair anyway, but it is nonetheless a clear recognition of the audience's comments and the scene expresses that Charles and Alli create the content and perform the way they

do in the video in correspondence with the reactions they are receiving from their earlier videos. This is also indicated in the video *PINK POWER RANGER IS HOT! (7.23.10 - Day 449)* in which they are reluctant to explain what happened to their dog, because they are afraid of the reactions in the comments (10:40). These examples thus demonstrate how parts of *CTFxC*'s online identity are constructed in the process of reception and interaction, where even though Charles' acknowledgment of comments might be staged, he reacts and acts in correspondence to the comments and uses them to build on and re-define his self-presentation. The process of changing the self in a dialogue between Charles and his viewers resembles the hermeneutic model of Paul Ricoeur (1984), in which he describes the process of meaning in the relationship between text and reader. In brief, Ricoeur presents an ideal reading with three distinctive but also interrelated readings (cf. 1984, pp. 168), where the first reading involves simple identification, e.g., genre recognition; secondly a more critical reading is added and raises questions about the text, of which the text itself provides the answers. Finally, Ricoeur includes a third critical reading, in which the reader is distanced to the text by mirroring and reflecting on the world outside of the specific text, for example, based on the reader's experience with everyday life and culture. In regards to YouTube, Ricoeur's model outlines how meaning of the self is ideally created and takes places in a dialogical interaction between videos, comments and Charles' readings of comments and self-reflections, where he thoroughly reads viewers' comments and reacts to them in his videos. Although these examples only show minor elements of Ricoeur's three readings, it can be argued that, in regards to *CTFxC,* self-presentation can be considered a part of an on-going process of identity formation, also similar to how Anthony Giddens considers identity formation as a self-reflexive process (cf. 1991).

11.2.4 Addressing a YouTube community

Although *CTFxC* frequently refers to widespread intertextual references, such as *The Simpsons*, popular music, movies and video games, *CTFxC* is very explicit in addressing YouTube as a community in which users need some knowledge of YouTube's popular content and its celebrities in order to understand what is being said in the videos. This also includes a video like *PARTAY IN THE PENTHOUSE! (7.9.10 - Day 435)* that takes place on *Vidcon*. The video is full of cameos of different YouTube celebrities who are recognised by viewers in the comments, which again reveals how many viewers are familiar with a large group of YouTubers who are part of the same exclusive community of the most popular YouTubers:

- OMG SMOSH
- SHANE DAWSON!!!!!!!! OH MY GOD!!!!! :)
- omg u saw charlieissocoollike, he is like so cool lol
- 4:47 OHMYGODITSCHARLIE!!!!!!!!!! <33333333
- RHETT AND LINK <3333333333333333333333333333
- DeStorm ftw!
- OMG PRANK VS PRANK ARE FREAKING HILLARIOUS. WOOOOOO!!!!HI5
- OMG its Micheal Buckley!!!!!! :O

Figure 48*: Recognition of YouTube celebrities*

As indicated by the comments, many viewers are familiar with many of the YouTube stars and it underlines the existence of a "para-social relationship" as touched upon in regards to *The Shaytards*. The mere recognition, as in the comments above, demonstrates what Meyrowitz, quoting Horton and Wohl, refers to as an example of "the pure para-social performer is simply 'known for being known'" (1985, p. 119). This basic recognition is also implicitly anticipated in the video of *CTFxC,* where no links, names or hints are given. But when reading the comments, it is evident that some viewers are

familiar with all of these references that somewhat address a sphere of the most popular YouTubers. The references to other famous YouTubers, and not the least that these YouTubers know Charles and Alli, reinforce how the online identity of *CTFxC* is very much linked with belongingness to the shared community of YouTubers and by which a group of the most popular YouTubers can distinguish themselves both in terms of their profession, but also by being acknowledged and visible (also see *11.1.9*).

The emotional statements of recognising somebody famous clearly signal a fan-celebration of other YouTubers. *CTFxC* provides a behind the scene access to other famous YouTubers, whom viewers can easily access on their respective channels, but by watching them through *CTFxC*'s channel, an aspect of intimacy is added, since we might see them act somewhat differently in Charles and Alli's video than they do on their own channel, because the setting and point of view are changed. An example of back-region bias can be found in *UH OH! BAR FIGHT! (7.12.10 - Day 438*), where Charles and Alli are literally filming behind the scene and talking with the YouTuber *iJustine* before she goes on stage. In this scene, *iJustine* shows her shaking hand to the camera to demonstrate how nervous she really is, and in that sense we see a part of her that viewers can not see on *iJustine'*s own Vlog, where she acts completely different, just like we witness the change to the more performing front-region role as she enters the stage. In the previous scene, Charles and Alli had just been on stage, which was filmed from their point of view. This also creates a visual shift, where we follow them from back stage towards front-stage, while the camera provides us with a direct point of view to the audience, which again underlines the ubiquitous style of the personal Vlog; we follow the YouTubers everywhere (cf. *10.1.1*).

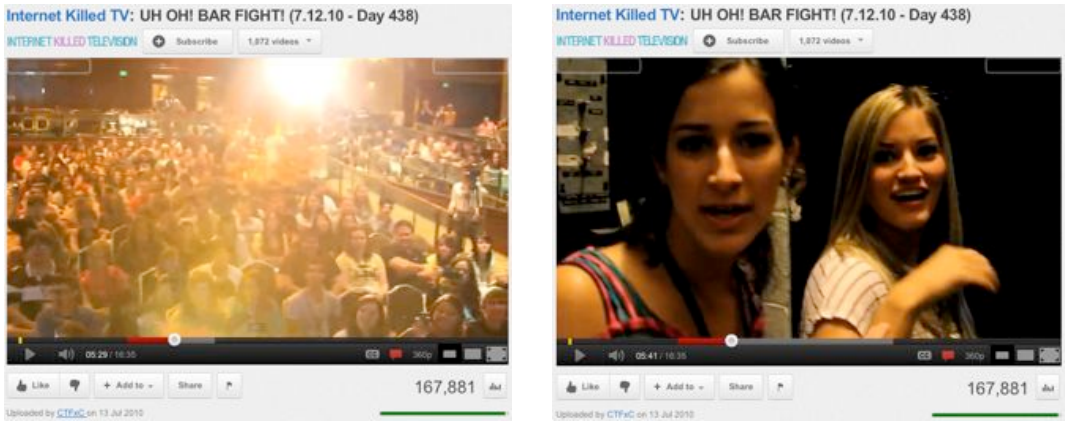


Figure 49: *Front-region point of view and back-region space behind the scene*

11.2.5 Multiple perspectives

The scenes in which YouTubers are performing on stage at Vidcon are simultaneously recorded by other Vloggers, who film the exact same scene from a different point of view. Vidcon for example is reflected, in this sample, in the videos of *The Shaytards, Whatthebuckshow, BrittaniLouiseTaylor, Smosh, PhillipDeFranco, ShaneDawsonTV, Pogobat, TheVlogBrothers* etc. Access to different channels potentially provides registrations of the same situations that can be viewed from both a front-region perspective as well as a back-region perspective. In these examples, recordings of Vidcon performances become a collective memory or visual manifestation of their YouTube identities.

Other examples include the Vlogs in which Charles and Alli are in Jamaica. They are testing the waterproof camera, and the camera company that wants them to test the camera pays for their trip. The camera company has also invited other YouTubers to test the camera. Therefore, in most of the scenes, four or five cameras are present and provide the recordings with at least four or five different point of

views. There is a shared group mentality that excludes exploitative or incriminating scenes, so even looking from another perspective, we are not likely to see anything fundamentally damaging in their behaviour. Another aspect of this is how multiple points of view create what Donath and Boyd (2004) refer to as a public display of connections, which I will return to in *12.6.3*.

The constant presence of different cameras in the Vlogs from Jamaica, furthermore, results in a constant reflecting and performative awareness of being part of a mediated holiday movie, where almost all actions are recorded, including the act of filming, which once again reminds us how the camera has become an everyday mode of communicating oneself.

Figure 50: *YouTubers filming the same situation*

11.2.6 Group identity

Vloggers also implicitly demonstrate what Meyrowitz suggests in regards to "group identity", i.e., there is always ""an otherness": (…) For a group to be an "us" there must also be a "them"" (1985, p. 54). The "us" is the Vloggers, while "them" is the audience. Both groups can be divided even further into separate groups, but if we focus on the group of most popular YouTubers, including the creators in this sample, and the most dedicated and consistent audience members, a great deal of meaning and sense making is created in terms of sharing the same social community. This means that beyond physical locations, they share knowledge and information that furthermore define appropriate social behaviour (ibid, p. 39). An interesting example of this is how dedicated viewers writing comments share the mediated reality of Charles and Alli and how they show their belongingness to the community by reacting aggressively towards viewers who dislike *CTFxC*. In most cases, dedicated fans react with collective exclusion of people who do not like *CTFxC*. This is done by "disliking" the comment that eventually receives so many negative comments that YouTube automatically hides it, and one needs to click on it to read it. Also, many users deliberately falsely flag negative comments as spam. As can also be revealed when reading the comments, this is not Charles or Alli trying to censor their own Vlog, but the so-called "true fans", who thereby just as in the case of *The Shaytards* acknowledge the role of themselves as the "significant other" rather than the "generalised other". At the same time, the dedicated fans contribute to the maintenance of the idealised joyful depiction of Charles and Alli. This underlines that the mediated representation of reality is acknowledged and extended in the comments, which again express a fundamental belongingness to the YouTube community, where the performative everyday life of Charles and Alli is moreover regarded as real.

But even though this shows a homogenous community, where creators and viewers share the same idea of reality, there is inherent distinction of social status. We can literally see how the group of "us" has access to situations that the "them" are not allowed into. This includes being invited to Vidcon, where

we as the audience are "invited" to have a peak into the community of Vloggers, but only as observers not as participants. This demonstrates what Shay, in the previous analysis of *The Shaytards*, addresses as the around 1,000 people he considers part of the community, including Charles and Alli, who identify themselves with the same group of YouTubers. Belongingness to the YouTube community in this particular example can be verified by being present in the specific setting of Vidcon. This of course also includes being visible and recognised in other YouTubers' videos, which is a verification of participation in the YouTube community, where the aforementioned collective memory both signals group identification but also authenticates them as YouTube authorities.

Meyrowitz touches upon the role of "authority" as he states "authority must be *performed*" (ibid, p. 63) [Italics in original] and furthermore: "one must have more access than the other people in the situation" (ibid.). Authority in the videos of *CTFxC* is created by the special behaviour altered by the presence of the camera. Filming anchors authority and separates the Vlogger from the audience that literally through the use of a camera gains authority and social status. Authority is not identified by specific knowledge that, e.g., doctors have, but authority is rather gained by mastering the skills of Vlogging, i.e., successfully performing everyday life that is publicly acknowledged in terms of the popular Vloggers' status as YouTube Partners. The status furthermore provides them with an identity as professional Vloggers, who have adopted Vlogging as a full-time profession. Finally, impressive statistics (top ratings and many comments and views) also anchor authority, which not only is a principal goal of creating traffic to gain economic payment, but also becomes a symbolic status of authority.

11.2.7 Summing up

With the videos of *CTFxC*, we see an example of the personal Vlog in which the presentations of the self are less performative in terms of direct performances in front of the camera. Instead, the series involves user-interaction and competitions in order to attract many viewers. They also interact with comments in terms of answering comments, or following suggestions in the comments, and in that sense they illustrate how meaning is very much taking place in the dialogical relationship between the world of the text and the viewers, where self-presentation takes place in an on-going process. This analysis, however, has not been able to reflect upon the many viewers that simply watch their videos without writing comments. In fact, in the 12 videos involved in this sample, the mean proportion of users writing comments is approximately 1.9 percent of the viewers, while the proportion of viewers who have written comments to *The Shaytards* is a little lower with 1.4% of viewers, which perhaps can be explained by the fact that *CTFxC* to a higher extent encourages their users to write comments and more explicitly interact with them. However, only a small proportion of the actual viewers interact by writing comments and user-involvement is even lower in regards to video responding. Yet, 4.6% of the viewers rate the videos of *CTFxC* and an average 4.9% of the viewers participate in terms of rating *The Shaytards*' videos. In that sense, following YouTube's registration of user-interaction, the proportion of user-participation is even lower than the so-called 90-9-1% ruled as described in *8.4*)

Although, we do not know the proportion of viewers who just read the comments, the videos of *CTFxC* reveal how user-interaction is outspoken in the content, while only a small percentage of viewers are actively involved in user-interaction. This underlines the necessity of making a distinction between different modes of participation (also argued by van Dijck 2009). Nonetheless, the analysis of *CTFxC* has also suggested that direct contact with viewers and the involvement of different YouTube affordances (links, comments, tags, subscribing) make the videos unique as personal Vlogs and enable Charles and Alli to reveal a sincere and authentic impression of themselves. In that sense, user-interaction may have a less direct effect, but contributes to characterise the personal Vlog as a more direct and intimate mode of communication.

11.3 A Personal fan Vlog – Shane Dawson

So far, different aspects of social performances and performativity have been discussed. In the following, I will elaborate on the aspect of intimacy and how it can provide the impression of authenticity. This aspect will be discussed through the case of the YouTuber Shane Dawson and his personal Vlog. Shane Dawson in recent years has become a YouTube idol with his own official fan-site with more than 1,000 registered members[22]. Shane is represented in this sample with 15 videos. These videos are shown on three different channels, and Shane acts differently on each channel. His videos can thus illustrate how YouTube provides the ability to present oneself through multiple channels, which I will return to in the next chapter.

11.3.1 Strategies of intimacy

As touched upon in regards to *The Shaytards*, the Vlog mode is very effective in establishing what Joshua Meyrowitz refers to as "intimacy with millions" (1985, p. 119), where the impression of intimacy between the creator and the audience is a simulation of a private and personal direct one-to-one meeting that simultaneously is disclosed for millions of viewers. But at the same time, it can be noted how emotional intimacy in *The Shaytards* was overshadowed by a performing Shay, who by his interaction with the surroundings and self-irony dismantled the notion of privacy in terms of being emotional, which would also contrast with the idealised public version of a happy family portrait. In the history of audiovisual representation, the video diary format stands out as one of the strongest examples of mediated intimacy (cf. Dovey 2004) or the confessional chair of the television programme *Big Brother* (e.g., Bondebjerg 2002).

I will use Shane Dawson's personal Vlog channel *Shane* as a demonstration of how intimacy is also being used in the personal Vlog. Before focusing on Shane's video, I will briefly refer to another video found in this sample. The video is called *But Anyway,* created by *JoshRocksGuitarHero*. He is making a personal Vlog on his summer holiday. In the video, he is sitting in his hotel room, and during his monologue to the camera, he gets up and closes the door, because as he says:

> "I just closed the door, I didn't want my Mom listening to my conversation to you guys, it's private, it's a private relationship" (02:04).

This small scene perfectly demonstrates "intimacy with millions", where the creator does not want his mother to listen, whereas he does not have a problem with disclosing himself on the Internet, because of the intimate situation with him and the camera. To disclose oneself online for this creator is regarded as a private dialogue, where his viewers are being addressed as "significant others" with whom he has a "private relationship".

Shane Dawson in a similar sense creates a private and personal relationship with his viewers in his personal Vlog, *Shane*. There are six videos registered in this sample from the channel *Shane*. *Shane* refers to his channel as his iPhone channel, where he films with his iPhone and according to him, he does not edit the videos, which also adds an unmediated layer similar to the web-cam registration. The videos are of-course biased in the sense that Shane turns on the camera and turns it off again at specific times, and although it is perhaps an unedited version, it is a biased representation. The result is nevertheless, a mode of video diary that is fragmented and loosely structured. We access the private life of Shane in an intimate space, where only Shane and the viewers are present. Shane is very conscious about communicating privacy and intimacy in terms of creating a communicative situation in which the viewer experiences being addressed personally and emotionally, and there are normally no other people present in his personal videos. In the very first clip of the video *!ZZ-NEY WORLD!*, Shane moves his

[22] Link to Shane Dawson's fansite: http://www.fanpop.com/spots/shane-dawson.

head around to make sure there is nobody around him and says: "I am making sure, there is nobody watching me" (00:05). He has lowered his voice too, so that the audience members are the only ones who can hear what he is saying. In this way, it is also underlined that we are alone with Shane, which is also illustrated as Shane at the end of the video turns the iPhone so we can see the empty terrace. The location also provides the video with a sense of intimacy, which becomes even more intimate in the video *HOOKER HEAVEN?*, where Shane is sitting in his car in a closed space that underlines we are completely alone with Shane. And just like *J!ZZ-NEY WORLD!,* the video *HOOKER HEAVEN?* is shot in the middle of the night, which Shane even turns into a topic of conversation as he writes in reference to the video:

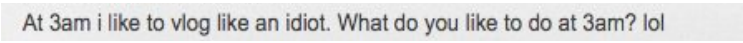


Figure 51: *Shane's self-reflection of filming at 3.a.m.*

Similar to this, Shane states, in the video *WE'RE NOMINATED FOR A **TEEN CHOICE AWARD**!,* that "it is 1.am!" and he automatically lowers his voice, as he does not want to wake up of his mother, who is sleeping in the next room. Shane is in that sense very conscious about establishing a space of intimacy in terms of the location and time of Vlogging. The fact that Shane films in the dark with no artificial lighting or does not edit or interfere with his physical appearance leaves an impression of a raw and unmediated aesthetic as also touched upon by Anja Hirdman in her investigation of a Swedish website as an example of what she refers to as "webcam intimacy" (2010, p. 6). This mode of rawness or unmediated appearance is furthermore reflected in Shane's physical appearance, as Shane in his personal channel *Shane* eventually appears slovenly and causal. In the video *Talking Dog*, a viewer notices this and for her or him this rawness authenticates Shane as a real person:

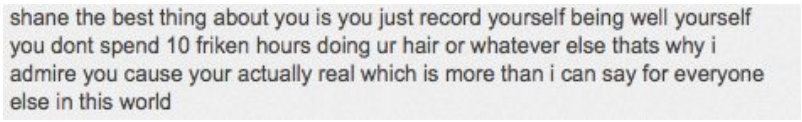


Figure 52: *Comment from the video Talking Dog*

Another aspect mentioned earlier is how the framing of Shane creates a stronger sense of intimacy, as in most cases he films himself in close-ups or even ultra-close-ups. As Stig Hjarvad (2002) argues, the use of close-ups brings us close to the person in the picture, creating the effect of intimate visual contact (cf. *10.1.1*), which can be noticed in the picture of Shane in an almost ultra close-up

Figure 53: *medium ultra-close-up of Shane*

11.3.2 The creation of a physical mediated space of intimacy

Shane has been awarded several times a "Teenage Choice Award" for the "best online teen phenomenon", which also provides him with a celebrity status beyond the YouTube community. However, at the same time he is loyal to the YouTube community in terms of acknowledging his audience, with whom he considers himself closely related, demonstrating a basic group-identification. This is clearly noticed in the title of the video *WE'RE NOMINATED FOR A **TEEN CHOICE AWARD**!* And he begins the video by saying:

> I got nominated for a teen…, no sorry *we* got nominated for a teen award (…) honestly I will just be thanking you guys, because you are the only reason I am anything.

Shane is very explicit in his awareness of the viewers, who are often blown kisses or involved in direct user-interactivity. And in the example above, viewers are credited and acknowledged as "we". But the relationship moves beyond the sharing of a culture and group; it is also an intimate emotional relationship, somewhat similar to how Donald Horton and Richard Wohl in their essay *Mass Communication and Parasocial Interaction* propose that mass media could provide an illusion of face-to-face communication. They define this mode of communication "para-social interaction".

> Sometimes the 'actor' – whether he is playing himself or performing in a fictional role – is seen engaged with others; but often he faces the spectator, uses the mode of direct address, talks as if he were conversing personally and privately (1956, p. 215).

This phenomenon has been adopted in many analyses of television (e.g., Meyrowitz 1985, Hjarvad 2002) and it can explain our involvement in television programmes such as *So You Think You Can Dance*. On YouTube, the same phenomenon is clearly at stake, as also touched upon in regards to recognising celebrities in *CTFxC's* videos. Yet at the same time, this "para-social interaction" can evoke a strong impression of intimacy, feeling more strongly connected to the presenter, e.g., as demonstrated with *The Shaytards*, when some fans regard themselves as true fans. But in the case of Shane, we see even stronger emotional ties, similar to what Horton and Wohl refer to as "extreme" para-social interaction: "The follower is actually 'in love' with the persona, and demands real reciprocity which the para-social relation cannot provide" (ibid, p. 227). The interesting aspect of this is that YouTube to some extent can provide this extreme example of para-social interaction.

It was previously argued that YouTube can provide a unique space of accessibility and controlled self-presentation that through the first-person gaze of the camera establishes non-interfering eye-contact between the creator and the spectators. Previous examples of video diaries and confession scenes in reality television demonstrate how a mediated intimacy is created through this. People say things to the camera they otherwise would not say. In a similar way, Shane uses the camera to share his personal experiences of life, where his Vlog functions as private space that is shared with millions of viewers. In the six videos observed in this sample, we learn that Shane grew up very poor and that neither he nor his family have ever been on holiday or on a plane before. We do not know whether or not Shane tells these things to his friends off-line, but it seems clear that the camera in many situations of Vlogging helps and even legitimates performative behaviour, as seen in the videos of *The Shaytards* and *CTFxC* and in this case also how mediated intimacy establishes a space of authenticity, i.e., of being real.

If we return to Horton and Wohl, they argue that para-social interaction cannot provide reciprocity of love, basically because the intimacy created in para-social interaction is an illusion; the relationship between the performer and the audience "is inevitably one-sided" (ibid., p. 217). This is also fundamentally true on YouTube, as people are not in physical contact, but the para-social interaction is not necessarily one-sided. YouTube provides the mediated direct contact through direct and instant comment writing and video responding, where Shane can declare his love to the viewers and even simulate physical contact which can instantly be responded by the viewers. This presents a much stronger impression of intimacy that traditional television cannot provide. As previously discussed, we now see examples of this more intimate interaction on television, but the para-social relationship provides an even stronger impression of authenticity between the person behind the camera and the audience in terms of how the video is presented outside public institutions and is not produced under influence of a production crew or an exterior producer.

The space of intimacy that Shane creates in his personal Vlog is regarded as real, which can be illustrated in the interaction between Shane and his viewers in the video *J!ZZ-NEY WORLD!*. In the video, Shane is kissing his audience good-night and thus implicitly his audience, while declaring his love to them:

Figure 54*: Shane is kissing the camera*

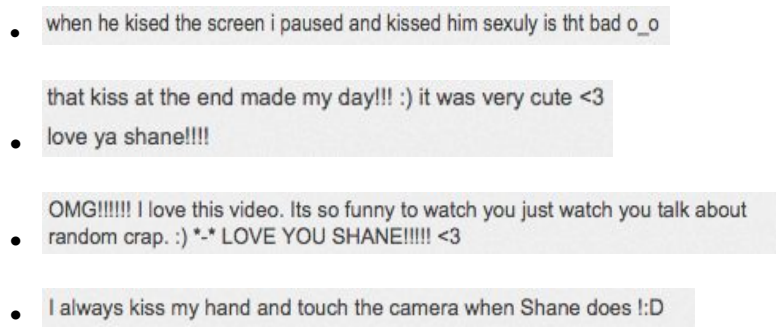


Figure 55: *Comment reactions to Shane's "camera kiss"*

In the comments, it can be noted how some viewers regard the screen and the camera as a physical extension of Shane, as they respond by kissing the screen, while pausing the video in the moment of the kiss, as in the frame-grab above or touching their own camera simultaneously with Shane. In this example, the mediated intimacy has somewhat replaced the face-to-face meeting, where the mediated version is regarded just as real. In the video responses, it can also be noticed how female viewers return Shane's virtual kiss by sending kisses towards the screen and declaring their love to him[23] (although most of the responses are not actual responses, but just using Shane's channel to draw attention to their own channel).

Even though the intimate relationship between Shane and his viewers is not face-to-face or interpersonal communication in terms of meeting in real life, YouTube provides a publish space for creating social bonds, where viewers can engage in a mediated face-to-face interaction that as a mode of intimacy with millions is perceived as real. This is also stressed by Stig Hjarvad in regards to mediated interpersonal communication, as he considers mediated face-to-face (interpersonal) communication equally authentic as non-mediated:

> But the simulated character of the communication does not render it less authentic or of a lesser rank; the receiver's reactions to these addresses, which are socially and psychologically real and integrated with the rest of communication are not unlike reactions in interpersonal communication (2002, p. 250).

In fact, Shane Dawson's relationship with his "fans" exemplifies this, where YouTube as a media platform is the provider of the social and psychological reality that they share and which could not exist anywhere else other than on YouTube, either on television or in real life. (Shane will not be able to maintain the same "intimacy with millions" off-line, because it is accentuated by the presence of the camera.) The intimacy created is shaped by Shane Dawson's authentic identity as it is presented online. And in that sense, the intimacy being built is not a simulation, but is real.

[23] I will not refer directly to any titles of the video responses, in order not to disclose the identity and to respect the privacy of the viewers (cf. *2.5*) that send private videos to Shane – although they are public and can be viewed by everyone.

12 - The Vlog Show

Moving from the personal Vlog to the Vlog Show, it is clear how the focus has changed. While the personal Vlog in most cases exemplifies self-presentations of everyday life, the focus on the self in the Vlog Show is transformed into a role as a presenter or a host that presents and reflects on various issues that, e.g., include mass media, news and other YouTube videos. It can also include fictional sketches that the performer uses as a way to display acting skills, which I shall return to the section below. The Vlog Show, however, is also personal in the sense that it is always framed by subjective reflections that are presented to the audience from a first-person position. There are many similarities between the Vlog Show and the popular television programme *The Daily Show*, with the host Jon Stewart as the predominant focal point, who combines news with sarcasm and stand up. Many YouTubers seem to have found inspiration in Jon Stewart's mode of addressing the audience by integrating humour as a principal communicative strategy. But The Vlog Show is different from *The Daily Show* and other similar shows, e.g., talk shows, which in the following I will investigate and through this perhaps also provide an explanation of how an impression of authenticity is at stake in the Vlog Show.

12.1 The Vlogger as multiple selves

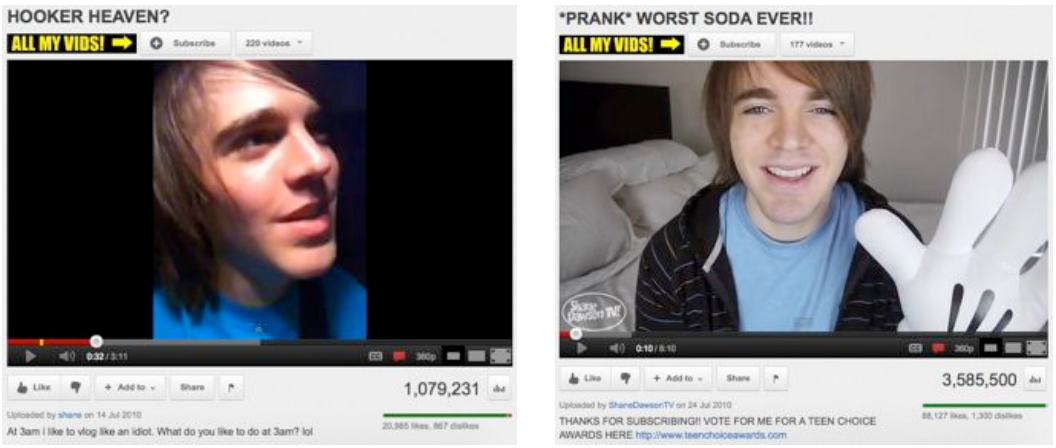
In the previous chapter, I investigated Shane Dawson's private Vlog, *Shane*. This channel is a somewhat different personal Vlog channel, because it can also be regarded as a specific back-region version of Shane that exists in relationship to Shane's other channel. Unlike *The Shaytards* and *CTFxC*, *Shane* is not a main channel. *Shane* frequently makes it clear that this is a secondary channel, and his main identity on YouTube is linked to his other channel *ShaneDawsonTV*. *ShaneDawsonTV* is a Vlog Show, where Shane presents himself as a host, an actor playing fictional characters, as well as showing himself "behind the scene", but there is no place for personal reflections on this channel. The personal Vlog channel *Shane* provides this space. The *Shane* channel is inherently related to his online public self as the host on his main channel, and the *Shane* channel provides him with a private back-stage setting.

In this way, YouTube as a media platform offers a somewhat unique ability to change yourself, dependent on the situation and setting. Meyrowitz states, quoting Goffman: "For each 'audience' we offer a somewhat different version of ourselves" (1985, p. 28). This is exactly what YouTube enables its users to do, by letting them create videos on various channels, where the shared context between Shane and his audience on his main channel is that he presents himself as a mediated performer, while on his personal Vlog he shares a personal and intimate version of himself. The difference on YouTube is that the audience is the same and that instantly through links they can move between the different selves. Many of them are clearly watching *Shane*, because they are already fans of his *ShaneDawsonTV* channel and *Shane* somewhat is a peak behind the stage of *ShaneDawsonTV*. On television, the popular show *So You Think You Can Dance* somewhat reflects on the same situation of "para-social interaction". Here, we are fascinated by somebody dancing because they are already famous, and we get to see glimpses of for instance a news host in a different social role than the front-region role we see on the news. But the difference is that the YouTube creator is in control of the multiple selves and is capable of navigating much easier through the different channels, since links are embedded directly into the video and users can thus present a more sincere version of the self on each individual channel, somewhat also underlying what Deibert (1997) saw as a characteristic of the hypermedia environment (cf. *6.7*). This is the case for Shane Dawson, where it is noticeable how his different channels overlap, but at the same time many of the videos firmly explain the specific context of the channel and its premise. Each channel in this way also functions as a self-confirmation and authentication of the social role performed on each channel.

An interesting mix of this can be found in Shane Dawson's video **PRANK* WORST SODA EVER!!* Shane is very conscious of consistency and that he uploads his videos to the right channels, but at the same time, he is also going on vacation. In the video, **PRANK* WORST SODA EVER!!* his solution to this is to combine his normal Vlog Show with his personal Vlog. **PRANK* WORST SODA EVER!!* is uploaded on *ShaneDawsonTV* instead of his *Shane* channel. The video is an unusual video on the *ShaneDawsonTV* channel, because the channel is normally a sketch channel or a Vlog Show, while the video is first and foremost a personal Vlog. Shane is also aware of this and he says in the beginning of the video:

> Since it is Friday, and I just got back, I haven't had time to make a "normal" sketch video, so I thought it might be funny to show me and my family's stupid ass adventures, but just so you know, I use an iPhone to film stuff, so sometimes it's gonna be a little – [compressed] (making a hand gesture signalling the format is compressed) (00:40).

Shane also repeats what he said in his personal Vlog, in the video *Hooker Heaven*, that he and his family had never been on a "real vacation before", or "even on a plane", but the difference is noticeable in terms of how Shane presents this information. The video is indexed by a logo, and in contrast to the personal Vlog with almost not lighting, he is sitting in daylight in a less intimate situation as shown below:



a *b*

Figure 56: *First person camera of Shane on his iPhone Ch. (a).& First person camera of Shane on his main channel (b)*

In **PRANK* WORST SODA EVER!!*, Shane has also edited the video, and added background music. And although the video reveals a lot of personal information and he sits in what looks like his bedroom, it appears less intimate than the videos on his personal Vlog channel *Shane* in terms of the raw aesthetic and by the framing, i.e., we are closer to him. As mentioned, his main channel is normally not a personal Vlog, but a sketch-show, where Shane plays different characters, and it is therefore legitimate that Shane presents this information somewhat differently on this channel with, e.g., wearing a big Mickey Mouse hand. In **PRANK* WORST SODA EVER!!*, Shane also presents personal information in a role as a host that serves as a narrator of a frame story. He can furthermore differentiate his role as a host from the self, he reveals in the following sequence, since the video is a reflection on a memory, as he has just returned from Disneyland, in contrast to *Hooker Heaven,* which was filmed just before they were going to Disneyland. There is therefore a temporal distinction between the content he is showing and the filmic presence he presents it from. This enables him to maintain the difference between him as a host belonging to *ShaneDawsonTV*, while at the same time showing himself and his family as real people in a holiday home movie that is filmed with another

camera and on different premises than his normal show. This provides a different form of intimacy analogous to the one described in the video *Hooker Heaven*, while Shane simultaneously in **PRANK* WORST SODA EVER!!* takes on a more distanced role that separates the film from the presentation of the self

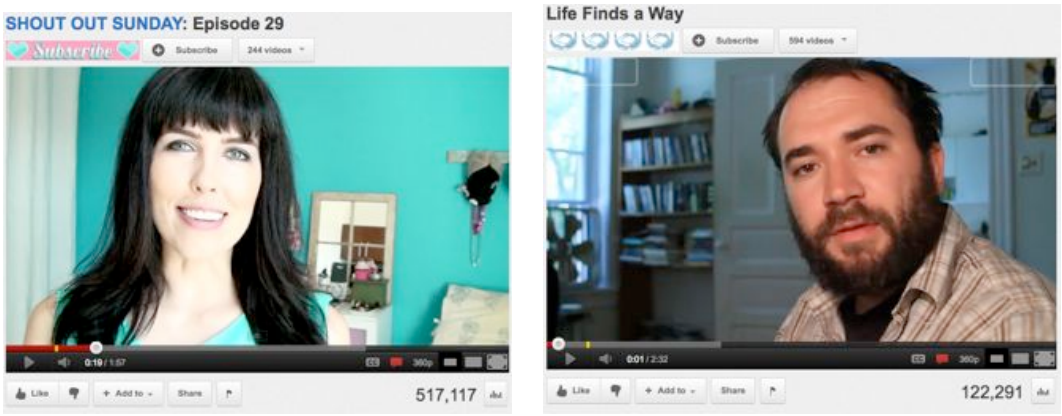
12.2 Presenting ordinariness

From this perspective, it is also noticeable how the Vlog Show is not necessarily considered less authentic or less sincere, as I will elaborate on in the following. But if we briefly compare the Vlog Show to a parallel on television, e.g., *The Daily Show*, the most obvious difference is that the Vlog Show is always a monologue in which the presenter or host only addresses the camera and not like *The Daily Show* or other talk shows that are dialogical in terms of guests, live audiences and interactions with back-stage people or other presenters. The Vlog host thereby creates a communicative situation only between the creator and the audience and it thus becomes a more intimate communicative situation. And like the personal Vlog, we are physically much closer to the person presenting in terms of the framing, where the host or the Vlogger in most cases presents him- or herself in a medium shot or a close-up shot, while the television host or a talk show host is more likely to be filmed in a full-shot.

Another fundamental difference is the setting. A Vlog Show is like the personal Vlog signalling a sense of amateurishness in its setup. As UGC, all of the Vlog Shows started out as amateur setups where the creators naturally could not afford a large studio setup; but even though the YouTubers in the Vlog Shows investigated in this sample are all YouTube Partners and now earning money, the setups have not changed fundamentally. Some Vloggers integrate a studio-setup look-alike in terms of a blue-screen as *Whatthebuckshow* or in the case of the Vlogger and host *Sexphil (*Figure 57a*)*, who now has a studio, but as can been seen below in this current sample presents his show from home. Other popular Vlog Shows are always filmed in a domestic setting. The picture below shows four Vlog Show setups:

a *b*

Figure 57: *Sexphil (a) and Whatthebuckshow (b)*



a *b*

Figure 58: *BrittaniLouiseTaylor (a) and Wheezywaiter (b)*

Three of the four pictures are illustrations of domestic settings. Only *Whatthebuckshow* presents a setup similar to a news host, where the presenter Michael Buckley is wearing a tie indicating a more formal role. However, this is in stark contrast to his behaviour and the things he reflects on, but at the same time it signals the type of content imitating a traditional news show. Buckley's setup is clearly not a professional studio-setup, but a simple blue-screen setup such that we occasionally also see the frame of, when the camera has been zoomed out a bit too much. Overall, it can be argued that all four setups are representative of YouTube, also including screen tags and different links that at the same time signal a sense of everyday life or ordinariness that was also touched upon in regards to the low-grade style (cf. *10.2*). This is also relevant in regards to how Paddy Scannell associates sincerity as analogous with ordinariness:

> Sincerity, we might say, is nowadays one defining characteristic of any person appearing in the public realm who lays claim to ordinariness. It is how you prove you are like the rest of us (1996, p. 74).

This is exactly what presenters of the Vlog show do when they build a semi-studio that most of the audience with a basic understanding of producing videos also can create and of course more noticeable with the domestic setting. At the same time, this is also the essence of the YouTube slogan: "Broadcast yourself" and what all YouTubers have in common; they all started out as ordinary creators, but also as showed in the previous section, an identity as a Vlogger or YouTube Vlog host automatically evokes a different social status.

12.3 Performative display of skills

Another characteristic of some Vlog Shows is the more traditional performative behaviour. While the personal Vlog illustrates performative social behaviour, many Vlog Shows also involve the traditional mode of performances or what Richard Schechner within performance studies has coined "restored behaviour" (cf. 2006), which involves performance as art and a display of skills. Richard Schechner states that this sort of performance is fundamentally concerned with transformation: "the startling ability of human beings to create themselves, to change, to become – for worse or better – what they ordinarily are not" (2006, p. 1). This transformation has many levels and can be regarded from several different perspectives. Schechner refers to a transformation that is a deliberate performance and has an aesthetic purpose or a performative intentionality that also can be found inside practices of theatre or as restored behaviour that basically describes the relationship between an actor and the role the actor plays.

Figure 59: *Onison Presenting the character and Onison Performing the character*

The Vlog Show frequently integrates the display of skilled performances in terms of acting or staging fictional characters. Like the YouTuber *Onison*, who in *THE JOKER JOKE* shows his acting skills by imitating the Joker from the film *The Dark Knight*. The video is framed by *Onison,* who situates himself as a presenter who addresses the audience from a first-person position, where he stands in front of a blue screen and tells his audience that he will not give them his imitation of the Joker. We are thereby simultaneously presented with the person-behind the character that enables us to isolate the performance as a display of skill that at the same time is being authenticated by a real person. The video is therefore just as much about the person *Onison* and his ability to imitate a character, where the personal layer is revealed by involving the behind stage version of himself presenting his fictional character. YouTubers like *Onison* and more noticeably Shane Dawson are perhaps stars on YouTube and on the Internet, but outside YouTube they are unknown. They therefore also use YouTube as an exhibition window**.** But at the same time, this also involves the potential of being excluded from the YouTube community, which somewhat happened to *Fred. Fred* was one of the first YouTubers to become famous on the outside, making a movie of his fictional character, which was aired on *Nickelodeon*[24]. One of the principal reasons for disliking *Fred* is perhaps his obnoxious helium-voice. But nevertheless, among many YouTubers, it seems legitimate to make satirical comments and distance themselves from *Fred*, which is somewhat unusual among the other YouTubers, who in most cases show respect for other YouTubers. But at least within the content observed in this sample, it is clear that *Fred* is not regarded as an equal or accepted member of the YouTube community and by many YouTubers he is not regarded as an authentic YouTuber. One of the principal modes to authenticate yourself in the YouTube community is through self-reflexivity, where creators can present themselves as YouTubers while simultaneously presenting their acting skills or stand-up skills, as is also the case for many creators of Vlog Shows.

12.4 Blurred boundaries

Similar to the personal Vlog, in the example of *Onison* and his "Joker" imitation, we are also reminded that we are now watching a fictional staging of a film character and that he is an ordinary YouTuber who wants to show us his skills by providing a sincere version of this fictional character. The Vlog Show can thereby demonstrate a self-reflexivity and expressiveness that authenticates the Vlog as sincere and transparent, because we witness the performative transformation of *Onion* from being a host to a fictional character (as shown in Figure 59). The presentation of two different types of performances can also explain why many of the Vlog Shows have been coded as a mix between fiction and non-fiction.

[24] See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Figglehorn, retrieved December 11, 2011.

The majority of the Vlogs Shows are coded as a mix between fiction and non-fiction since many of the Vlog Shows combine self-presentation and self-promotion, as illustrated with the example of *Onison*. The distinction between fiction and non-fiction is thus constantly blurred. The Vlog Show is therefore also the Vlog type with the lowest proportion of videos coded as non-fiction. Only 26% of the videos were coded as non-fiction, while 65% of the Vlog Shows have been coded as a mix of fiction and non-fiction and finally around 9% of the videos were coded as fiction. Although there are still more videos coded as non-fiction than fiction, this type of Vlog is different in regards to addressing reality in comparison to the personal Vlog. An example of how fiction and non-fiction is constantly blurred is evident in Shane Dawson's video *TEAM JACOB?: ASK SHANE #7*. The video is a Vlog Show, where the host Shane Dawson performs different fictional characters that in most cases are satirical parodies of phenomena in popular culture. But juxtaposed with this, Shane also embeds a layer of didactic instruction of "how to". Encouraged by a question from a viewer, he involves a tutorial on how to edit a video. This shift is illustrated by a sign in the video, "Learning to edit", where we see how Shane is editing a sketch from a previous video, *7 minutes in Heaven*, in which he plays a fictional character.

Figure 60*: Three roles: Vlog host, behind the scene and a fictional character*

Shane is mixing fiction and non-fiction following no standard genre definitions. Everything is mixed and the videos become a blurred presentation of acting skills, satire, and user-interaction, where fiction and non-fiction are constantly mixed. In the video *7 minutes in Heaven*, Shane Dawson likewise stages biographical memories with fictional characters and combines user-involvement with fictional scenes that in a sense are being used as illustrations of non-fiction action, but without the intimate sense of privacy as demonstrated in the videos on his other channel, *Shane*. A user's ability to navigate between the two different modes of self-presentation is enabled by the involvement of self-reflexivity, as seen at the end of *TEAM JACOB? : ASK SHANE #7* when he takes of his mask to demonstrate that the role he is playing is in fact just a role.

Since *ShaneDawsonTV* is first and foremost entertainment, one could ask why is there a need to explain to the audience that it is a fictional setup or present the person behind the character if the purpose was just to entertain? What characterises almost all UGC in this sample is the underlying emphasis on the fact that the video is UGC and in most cases this is done by involving the creator of the video in his or her domestic setting or through a reflection of the self. Again, this is also a demonstration of an emerging tendency to disclose audiovisual public self-images online. In the case of Shane Dawson, his channel may seem concentrated on giving audiences a funny and entertaining experience when watching his videos, but everything is linked to Shane's person; his show is called *ShaneDawsonTV* and the comments below the videos are not addressing what he presents, but the comments rather address the person who presents it and how he does it.

Paddy Scannell argues that sincerity is a fundamental aspect of presenting an authentic, true version of the self, who above all must not hide anything:

> Sincerity is a form of self-display without concealment (…) To be sincere is to be the genuine article, the real thing (…) Sincerity therefore is prized, above all, as the hallmark of a true person" (1996, p. 59).

In the case of Shane Dawson and many other Vlog Shows, self-reflexivity is being used to show that a genuine real "I" exists behind the staged performance and by showing both versions of the self, the Vlogger exhibits "self-display without concealment". The involvement of self-reflexivity on YouTube also is a difference from similar fictional sketches, e.g., on *The Daily Show*, where we do not see the same similar reflection of fictional performances. According to Scannell, personal sincerity is just as much provided by public institutions, which makes the need for displaying sincerity less relevant:

> In public institutional life, interactants are deprived of their personal attributes (…) It is in this sense that sincerity – as the hallmark of the personal – is absent from public, institutional systems (ibid., p. 60).

If a journalist is exposed as a fraud, it of course has a personal impact on the journalist, who most likely will be fired. However, people do not complain personally to the journalist, but to the newspaper, radio station or television station. On YouTube it is somewhat different, as YouTube is characterised by a decentralised institutional organisation (cf. *7.4*), and if a YouTuber acts inappropriately or non-authentically, viewers respond directly to the YouTuber. Authenticity is therefore more explicitly linked to the people behind the YouTube channel.

12.5 *RayWilliamJohnson* – "a regular guy with an entertaining hobby"

RayWilliamJohnson is the most subscribed channel on YouTube with more than 5 million subscribers as of December 2011. *RayWilliamJohnson* is a first-person presentation of the host Ray William Johnson. Ray's videos consist of presenting funny and excessive videos with a layer of subjectivity similar to a stand-up show or somewhat analogous to a television programme like *America's Funniest Home Videos* and what Jon Dovey coins "reality slapstick" (2004, p. 559). But Ray's show is different from a show like *America's Funniest Home Videos* in terms of its overall focus on the skill of presenting and communicating rather than the actual content.

In the written text in his channel, the YouTuber *RayWilliamJohnson* presents himself as a "regular guy with an entertaining hobby":

- I'm just a regular guy with an entertaining hobby. I review viral videos twice a week -- every Monday and Thursday (New York time) (cf. *RayWilliamJohnson*'s YouTube Channel).

As Ray implies, there are two fundamental aspects in his videos: first it is a show about watching and reviewing videos, and second it is show about Ray's person as a "regular guy" who also provides the videos sarcasm, and an embodied subjectivity in terms of Ray's direct first-person contact with his viewers. Ray is not only presenting, he also embeds user-comments and video questions in his videos. This also involves a sense of sociability, where viewers can enjoy the company of Ray, as I shall return to later.

There are nine videos of RayWilliamJohnson included in the sample and they are all part of an on-going show with a running time of approximately 5 minutes. Each video starts with the same opening credit, i.e., of a sign with the show's name *Equal three = 3*. There is also an added music score accompanied by Ray's welcome line: "What's happening forum" followed by his name. Each of Ray's videos always involves clips from three different videos and underlines the title of his show. Since Ray's videos follow the exact same structure, I shall primarily address his show as one whole work.

12.5.1 Performing the YouTube host

Ray is an example of a YouTuber who stages himself as a host. By taking on the role, he also signals less commitment to reveal personal and autobiographic information. Ray's primary role is to be funny and make jokes about the videos. His personality is not based on the ability to present an authentic version of reality, but by his ability to be an ordinary person, who is funny and entertaining. The question of fiction and non-fiction is therefore less relevant as the clips in most cases are home videos and they primarily serve as a voyeuristic gaze into other people's funny or casual lives rather than documenting anything (also see Dovey 2004, p. 559). Thus, Ray does not authenticate himself through these clips as, e.g., in the personal Vlog, but they primarily serve a function as cultural references shared by him and his viewers.

Even though Ray provides little knowledge about himself as a person, it does not mean he does not include personal elements that distinguish him as an authentic person on YouTube. As argued earlier (*8.10.2*), the impression of authenticity is very much related to presenting the self not only by saying (sincerity) but also by being. Ray is presenting himself as a "regular guy" (cf. above), and in order to be acknowledged by his audience, he both needs to be a funny entertainer, while at the same time providing the authentic impression of being a regular guy performing as a host. Ray communicates this by calling his channel by his own name, *RayWilliamJohnson* and underlines this fact by opening each video with the statement "My name is Ray William Johnson", which we as viewers have no reason not to trust. This is of course not an unusual way of authenticating the self, just as the basic physical

identification of him provided by the presence of the camera is a basic mode of verifying Ray, as regular viewers recognise his face from previous shows. His physical appearance is automatically being judged and must somewhat be consistent in terms of himself as a regular guy that performs as a host, where for example if he all of a sudden appeared physically different, he would be expected to explain his physical transformation in order to maintain the idea of him as a real person. But in order to authenticate himself within the YouTube community, he also needs to present himself and interact with his audience in a specific way, which as argued previously can be presented as an illustration of what Scannell suggests is done by "claiming ordinariness"(cf. *12.2*). Ray "claims" ordinariness by adopting the previously mentioned "low grade" Vlog style (e.g., presenting videos in his living room or bedroom or filming with the camera out of focus) and through different modes of user-involvement similar to the user-involvement already discussed in regards to the personal Vlog, but at the same time, the references to the group-identity of YouTube can also be established by various reflections of texts from widespread popular culture.

Figure 61: *Examples of "low grade" style and user-involvement* (I have blurred the later in Photo-shop)

12.5.2 Sharing popular culture

Ray involves his users in terms of a collective forum that at the beginning of each video is addressed as the "what's happening forum". Another consistent element of Ray's videos is the direct embedding of users. At the end of each video, Ray presents "The comic question of today", which is asked by a viewer through a video response. This response is embedded into Ray's video and followed by user comments answering "the comic question of today" from the previous video. Ray receives the videos he selects for his show from his viewers. And because they have not made the videos they send to Ray themselves, Ray can establish a collective voice that shares an ironic distance towards the videos. This is also linked to another part of Ray's role as a host, where he reviews the videos in terms of the amount of views and whether or not it is a good or funny video, which thus embeds an aspect of cultural opinion regarding the videos.

Susannah Stern argues in regards to youth identities and personal blogs that people are conscious about the image they provide of themselves as influenced by the underlying culture and states in regards to young people: "As they fashion themselves for self and others, what they highlight is often informed by what the media and culture industries tell them is 'cool;'" (2008, p. 107). Following this, we could turn it around and regard Ray's channel analogous to a cultural institution within YouTube that provides a public image of what is "cool" or funny. This would simultaneously apply to the cultural taste of the

viewers, since they send the content and are allowed to comment on them. Hence, the user-involvement establishes a shared idea of what verifies the content that thus also strengthens the idea of a shared group identity within the YouTube community.

In the video *Batman!!!*., in addition to the three involved videos, Ray incorporates a long list of intertextual references, including references to *Family Guy*, *Attack of the Show*, *Men in Blac*k, *CNN*, *George Orwell*, *Batman* and *Farmville*. Overall, the many intertextual references, except for George Orwell, address a young audience familiar with, e.g., Family Guy and Facebook games, with which people over 30 in most cases are not familiar. *RayWilliamJohnson* is also reflecting on the already popular YouTube content as can exemplified with *Batman!!!*., which includes a video with a clumsy news reporter, a dog sounding like Batman and a Cow remix. These three clips can also be found as individual videos in this sample of 900 videos, which is a sample of some of the most popular videos on YouTube.

This is also an aspect that was discussed in the article *The Mashups of YouTube*; where Mashups in a similar way articulate the shared identity that is found in a social network, where users are familiar with the already popular content that many Mashups recombine. Ray follows the same principle when he reflects and comments on content that is already popular, which thereby addresses a large YouTube community, where viewers navigate and consume Ray's videos equipped with the a shared set of intertextual references. Ray's videos, however, are not Mashups since they do not create new meaning by remixing them. They are only given new contextual meaning by Ray's interaction and explicit comments on them, which are separated from the quoted clips themselves, unlike the Mashups that remix the actual content. Ray's show thus provides a self-confirmation for the audiences that they share the same videos and thus the same community that underlines the aforementioned mode of group identification as, e.g., touched upon in regards to *CTFxC*, which is here extended to involve both the YouTube community but also a widespread popular culture beyond the perimeters of YouTube.

Ray is relying on the clips to build his flow and narrative (as he frequently plays different performative roles that interact with the video clips) and the content is therefore important. His show also needs to be funny and entertaining in order to be positively received, but at the same time, the content seems of less importance in relationship to how the user-interaction takes place both within the videos as well as in the paratexts surrounding the videos.

12.5.3 Sociability

One aspect this dissertation has not touched upon is sociability that perhaps also can explain the popularity of Ray's videos. George Simmel regards the purpose of sociability as conversation, where talking becomes a goal in itself: "In purely sociable conversation, the topic is merely the indispensable medium through which the lively exchange of speech itself unfolds its attractions" (1950, p. 52.). Although talking is not the end goal in all content of the videos, YouTube facilitates the means for sociability. This is also outlined by Tove A. Rasmussen et al. in regards to UGC and social media:

> Sociability is also about sharing and networking. One of the most important resemblances to the blog phenomenon is that users share a good piece of programming with their mates by linking and the sites for sharing and distributing user-generated videos provide very handy tools for doing just that (2009, p. 8).

The dialogical mode of communication and the establishment of the direct contact and one-to-one mode of communication provided by YouTube as a media platform is where viewers and creators through sharing and linking and through comment writing or responding can be social and enjoy other people's company.

In Ray's videos, viewers are reminded that they are not just watching videos, they are also invited to contribute, since it is the viewers who send videos to Ray for him to review, and it is a viewer who asks "the question of the day" and other viewers who answer, while Ray remains in the background. In that sense, Ray's videos also reflect on what Paddy Scannell argues is an important feature of the successful relationship between creators and audiences in order to build up a social agreement in which sociability is found: "It means orienting to the normative values of ordinary talk in which participants have equal status and equal discursive rights" (1996, p. 24). Ray furthermore seems conscious about not talking down to his audience, which can perhaps also be reflected in how he integrates a specific mode of reaching and involving the audience in terms of everyday texting acronyms like FTW or LOLWFT that clearly address his young audience as well as indicating the use of other social media platforms.

Horton and Wohl state that a television "persona" through sociability can especially affect isolated people, where the company of, e.g., a TV host can be regarded as para-social interaction: "The persona himself is readily available as an object of love – especially when he succeeds in cultivating the recommended quality of 'heart.'" (1956, p. 224). On YouTube, accordingly, simulated face-to-face communication is taking place online as, e.g., demonstrated in the example of Shane, when teenagers engage in a intimate communicative situation with Shane, but in a similar way does the involvement in the shared cultural exchange of videos also strengthens the relationship between Ray and the viewers who enjoy Ray's company. Finally, Ray's show is called *Equals Three =3* and it is also an association and comment to the official emoticon for love "<3", which functions as a replacement for facial gestures and emotions (also see Huffaker et al. 2005, p. 16). This is furthermore expressed at the end of each video, when Ray addresses his audience by saying: "you know I love you guys". Overall, Ray combines the role as a host presenting videos with an online identity that mirrors young people consuming videos, and who he addresses through intertextual references and online "teenage language" (acronyms and emoticons). He thereby establishes an illusion of an emotional relationship, where Ray appears as a both likeable and entertaining person that users can enjoy the company of.

12.5.4 Changing the format

A final issue involves negative reactions to changes and how this can result in insincerity. Ray is the most subscribed person on YouTube, which obviously underlines his popularity, but it is noticeable that Ray also receives many negative comments. Ray disables all the comments related to his video, when he uploads a new video. This is per se a point of criticism in many comments in regards to a lack of transparency on his channel similar to how users reacted negative to the YouTuber *meekakitty* because she made one of her videos private (cf. *11.2.1*). The only way to examine comments is thus to include Ray's most recent video. Without going into detail, a video named *MASHED POTATOES*, uploaded December 6, 2011, follows the same structure as the videos in the sample collected in 2010, with Ray presenting three clips from three different videos sent to him by the viewers. The comments primarily address the question asked by Ray in the video, which he will integrate in the forthcoming video. In the comments, which address Ray's direct question, it is also noticeable how viewers are less personal in their own reflections in comparison to the personal Vlogs, where there are many examples of naïve identifications with the what goes on in the video. This is not the case for Ray's video. The comments instead mirror Ray's irony and function as repetitions of what we see in the video, which also indicates that it is not so much about the content as how Ray presents it. Although it is not possible to make any comparison with the comments added to the videos involved in this sample, in the video of 2011 there are many negative comments towards Ray as a person and as a host, which is something that was not observed in the personal Vlogs (besides in the aggressive Vlogs (cf. *10.7*)).

The analysis of *RayWilliamJohnson*'s videos is limited to the sample's specific time of collection; as such, the nine videos coded here appear obviously more homogenous than if nine videos had been collected from a temporally longer period. It is beyond the scope of this study to make any comparisons with the latest videos, but by looking at the randomly selected video, *MASHED POTATOES* from 2011, it is also noticeable how the use of SFX, animations and show-specific iconic styles (official logos, crew credits) have been integrated into the video, just like the audience interaction has been replaced by celebrity cameos (e.g., Robbie Williams), and these changes somewhat explain the negative comments. The negative comments are especially addressed regarding Ray's show not being funny and that he is now involving several characters, both in front of and behind the camera. Supported by the fact that his videos have now embedded credits and feature famous people outside the YouTube community, the show now seems more similar to a traditional television show with a live audience. Whether or not it is these features that many comment writers dislike can not be fully determined here, but many comments state that they prefer the old Ray, which is also implied by the first three ironic comments to his "question of the day: how do you stand out?":

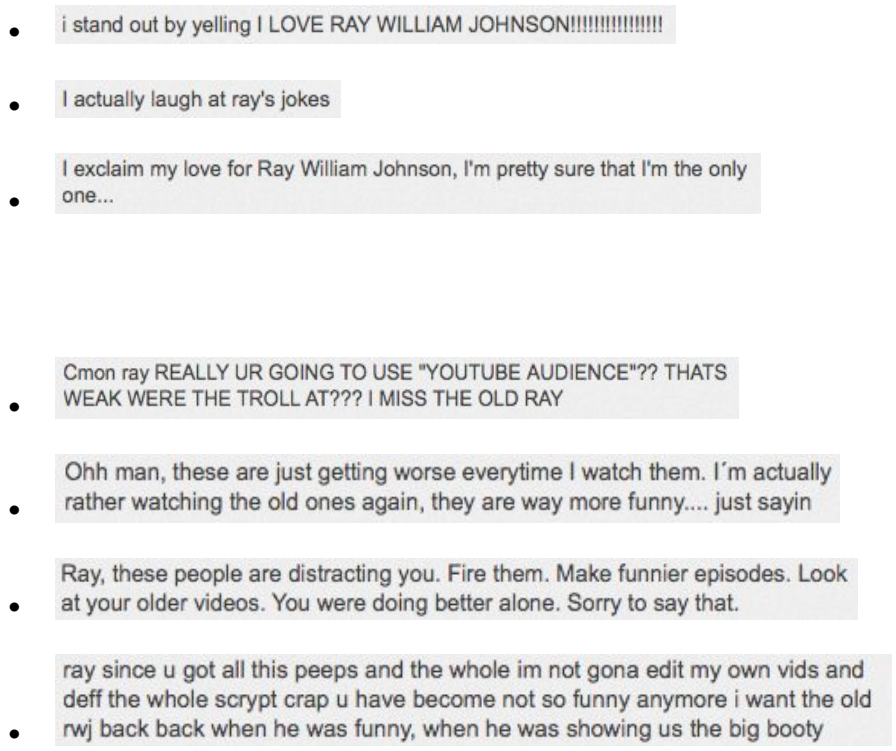


Figure 62: *Negative comments to Ray's show*

As we read some of the comments above, there also seems to be a general discontent with Ray's change of format and the fact that he has involved more people in order to produce his videos. As stated in one comment: "ray, since you got all this peeps [people] and the whole im not gonna edit my own vids (…) u have become not so funny anymore, I want the old rwj". This comment touches upon Ray's lack of authenticity towards himself (being "the old ray") and demonstrates the aforementioned authenticity that is also linked to YouTube as a space of ordinariness in which he originally identified himself as a regular guy: an ordinary YouTuber. This idea has been challenged with the involvement of a production team that has moved Ray's videos out of the community and towards more standardised

modes of production that at the same time make them less personal, as he is no longer editing his own videos. And this seems to be the message of all of the comments; they want the old Ray back, because he was more funny, but also because he was more authentic.

12.5.5 Summing up

The discussion of Ray William Johnson's videos should demonstrate how the presentation of the self adopting the role of the host is first and foremost concerned with providing an impression of an authentic role as a host that is not concerned with being personal or intimate, but rather, as earlier stated in regards to Joshua Meyrowitz: "the attitude of the performers toward their own roles" (1985, p. 30). In regards to Ray, this is fundamentally about being a "regular guy" and the ability to successfully perform this ordinariness in the public space of YouTube. As also argued, users can also identify with Ray through the shared reference of a popular culture, where the videos anchor a collective cultural taste that signals a group identity and which moreover can be demonstrated in how YouTube and its modes of distributing content can evoke a sense of sociability.

12.6 *BrittaniLouiseTaylor* – a YouTube friend

The last example of a Vlog Show that will be included here is that of the female actress and singer *BrittaniLouiseTaylor*. Similar to other popular Vloggers, she appears on several different channels, including her channel *BrittaniLouiseTaylor*, which analogous to *ShaneDawsonTV* is a Vlog Show, where she displays acting skills and performs as different fictional characters. She also has a personal Vlog named *Brittani*, where she involves more personal and intimate aspects of herself. On the channel *BrittaniLouiseTaylor*, she moreover provides a series of videos that are somewhat in between the personal Vlog and the Vlog Show. They are a part of her Vlog Show, but are uploaded everyday Sunday and are therefore called *Shout out Sundays*. These videos are user-embedded videos, where she involves and "hangs out" with her viewers. In this sample, eight videos by Brittani Louise Taylor have been registered and four of these are entitled *Shout out Sundays*. In the following I will elaborate on how Brittani uses the *Shout out Sundays* videos to interact with and embed her audiences in the videos, and finally how this also enables her to create online friendships that also help to authenticate her online identity. The format in the videos is short and compressed, presented in a rapid and fragmented tempo. Brittani blends different roles of herself as a host and her skills as an actress, performing different roles and situations encouraged by the users, who send her responses, emails, letters, pictures and videos from a range of various social networks. Each video is consistently structured around the same content pattern, which I will describe in detail in the following.

I will demonstrate the consistent component with one of the four videos, *Shout Out Sundays - episode 31*. *Shout out Sundays* are introduced with a 5-second animated sequence that situates Brittani in her environment, followed by a funny comment, while she says hello. In *Shout Out Sundays - episode 31,* Brittani integrates user-activity taking place on her Twitter profile (which is also shown by a text sign (00:10), from which she has selected comments and questions. The most funny or interesting is embedded into the video, placed at the bottom of the screen with the users' Twitter profile. This is followed by a short sketch, where she has added a helium effect to her voice in order to indicate a change of role, while her physical appearance is identical to her appearance as a host. This is followed by a reference to Dailybooth, where she shows how a user has "Photo-shopped" her into a gorilla (Figure 63.a), which in the following scene she imitates. The next clip is an encouragement for the viewers to rate the video "thumbs up" (Figure 63.b). She also has old-fashioned contact with her viewers as in the subsequent clip she has received a picture through the mail, which she shows to the camera. At 00:43, she involves her "Facebook Fan page" (Figure 63.c) as a reference, where she cites viewers' comments and uploaded pictures – once again followed by a small sketch scene that imitates her Facebook pictures. Then she involves her website and her chat-room (Figure 63.d), where users are sending her photos of themselves wearing the merchandise she is selling on her website (01:05). She moreover involves users from her YouTube channel (01:18) (Figure 63.e) as well as her second YouTube channel, *Brittani* (01:30) (Figure 63.f) The video ends with "question time", where viewers are asked to complete a sentence either through comments or video responding. The last clip (01:55) of the video is an animated *outro* of Brittani eating cakes.

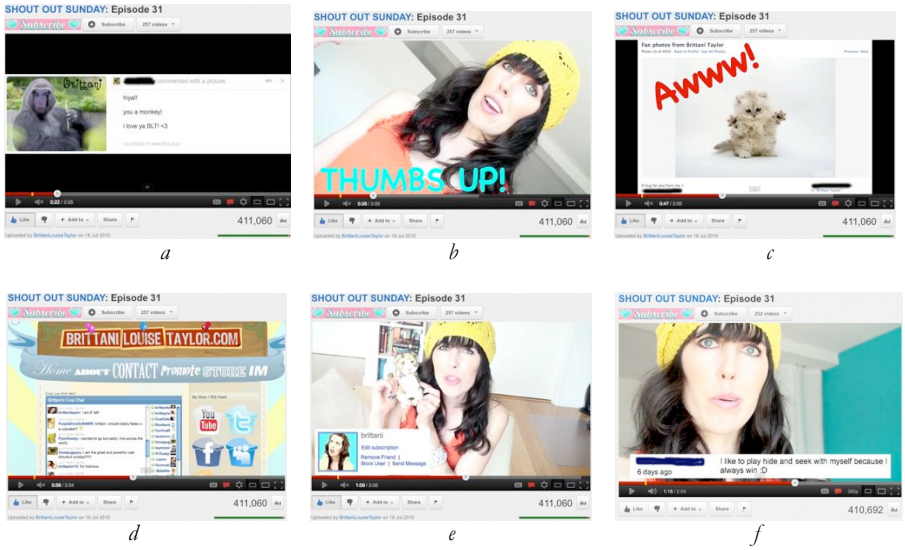


Figure 63: *Brittani - embedding users, social networks and her other channel*

As can be noted, a great deal of information is presented to the viewers on many platforms. Moreover, most of the content is provided by the viewers, who thus become collaborators and co-contributors. Of course, Brittani is in editorial control, as she chooses who is going to be displayed in the video, but the videos nevertheless signal what Axel Bruns has regarded as an example of "the communicative aspects of cultural participation – the perhaps fundamental, innate human tendency to share what interests, excites, and entertain us" (2008, pp. 243-244).

Viewers are participating and engaging with Brittani through almost all available social networks that distribute videos and herself in multiple ways, which thus becomes an audiovisual bulletin board that moreover expands the communicative situation.

12.6.1 Online Friends

To a certain extent, the mode of "cultural participation" also levels Brittani with her viewers who become more than just viewers; they become her friends with whom she shares her Sundays. As she writes underneath her video in *Shout Out Sundays: episode 29*:

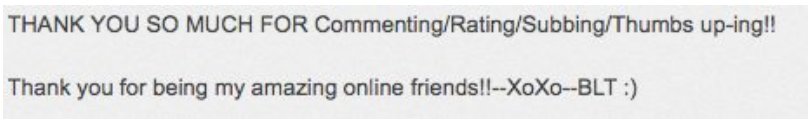


Figure 64: *Brittani addressing her viewers as "online friends"*

It is also noticeable how Brittani engages with her audience, answering questions without revealing any intimate or personal things. The issues being discussed are everyday, somewhat naïve things about sending Brittani funny pictures, which she imitates, as with the scene of the gorilla or reflects upon flowers and the enjoyable things about cupcakes. This is also related to the notion of sociability as discussed in the previous analysis, where *Shout out Sundays* seems very much about enjoying each other's company in public.

Figure 65: *Demographics of Brittani's audience*

Brittani furthermore seems to have identified her audience. If we look at the YouTube statistics in Figure 65 provided for each of the four videos, all of them indicate that the principal demographic audiences are females age 13-17 and females aged 18-24 (although males 13-17 are also listed). This is also reflected in the topics included in the videos, e.g., kittens, cupcakes and fashion. Even though there are also many intertextual references that are not gender specific, the design of her videos somewhat connotes a female dominated audience as can also be observed in the frame grab below:

Figure 66: *Feminine Vlog design*

The design of the animations with hearts and cupcakes in pink colours have clearly a more feminine touch than, e.g. the domestic-setup of *Sxephil*, whose setup on the contrary resembles a traditional teenage male's room (cf. 12.2). Thus, the majority of female viewers in *Shout Out Sundays* are perhaps also illustrated in the fact that, in the comments, there is less focus on Brittani's physical appearance in terms of sexual objectification, as is the case for Shane Dawson, where it is evident that many of his female viewers are commenting on his looks. This is also illustrated in the video responses uploaded to the video *Shout out Sunday: Episode 30*, where as of December 6, 2011, only 8 out of the 51 video responses were made by male creators.

12.6.2 An authoritative role

Even though Brittani with her videos establishes an online mode of friendship, *Shout out Sundays* are contextualised by an overt distinction between Brittani and her viewers in terms of her different social status. Brittani and her viewers share a group identity, i.e., of being present together in the same rather closed YouTube community within her channel, but at the same time, they are also situated in a fan/star relationship. This relationship can perhaps also be regarded in relation to Meyrowitz, when he argues that politicians need to balance between "greatness" or authority and ordinariness:

> 'Greatness' is an abstraction, and it fades as the image of the distant leader comes to resemble an encounter with an intimate acquaintance (1985, p. 273).

If this aspect can be used to explain the relationship between Brittani and her viewers, she can be friends with them, but she simultaneously is required to a keep a distance if she wants to maintain her status as a YouTube celebrity, and this is why she does not make video responses to them or write on their Facebook walls. This distance is of course naturalised by the fact that she is the creator and producer of audiovisual content and the fans are her viewers visiting her channel. Brittani is a YouTube celebrity and a YouTube partner and her viewers interact with her as the star. They are not her private friends, but are online and members of her Facebook Fan page, just like they are sending her fan pictures and fan letters as well as filming themselves wearing merchandise they bought on her website.

There is therefore a natural distance between Brittani and her fans analogous to the traditional relationship between a star and her fans; but YouTube provides the unique direct contact and a stronger sense of "para-social" interaction, as shown with *Shane,* where relationships between celebrities and fans become much more powerful than, e.g., on television, where contact involves many more layers. On the one hand, it resembles the direct contact between people in a live situation, e.g., on the radio, but on the other hand, the unlimited accessibility of YouTube together with the control of the creators have resulted in an unique situation, where, e.g., Brittani can create online friendships that are clearly contextualised by a commercial aspect, but nonetheless are regarded as authentic. This furthermore is reinforced by the involvement of her various self-presentations on other social networks including Facebook, Twitter, Dailybooth as well as her personal Website.

12.6.3 Public verification through linking

This aspect refers to how the integration and display of social networks and other media platforms outside the perimeters of YouTube contribute to the construction of authenticity. Donath and Boyd have argued that a widespread display of the self in public implicitly authenticates you as a person: "a public display of connections in an implicit verification of identity" (2004, p. 73). When Brittani involves her Facebook profile, her personal Vlog, her personal website and her Twitter profile, where she interacts with other celebrity YouTubers, it verifies her as a person. As such, this is because all the sites reveal her physical image, where each of her social network profiles is linked to another, thus stressing that it is in fact Brittani Louise Taylor and not a pseudonym of another person. This is also underlined by Donath and Boyd as they continue:

> (…) the public display of connections found on networking sites should ensure honest self-presentation because one's connections are linked to one's profile; they have both seen it and, implicitly, sanctioned it (ibid., p. 73-74).

The YouTube identity is even more vulnerable to exposure, since the public critics can confront the person directly on the channel in terms of comments and video responses. This relationship with the YouTuber is unbalanced, since the viewer who criticises the video can remain anonymous and separated in time, as argued earlier in regards to Harold Innis (cf. *6.2*), unlike the creator, who is constantly present both in time and physically. For this reason, we can perhaps see how Brittani is building her online friendship with her users through a personal distance, just like *The Shaytards* creates an idealised image of the family. In regards to *CTFxC*, it can also be stated how the use of multiple selves (cf. *11.2.5*) could be identified as a mode of public displays of the self, since YouTubers thus appear on different channels in other YouTubers' videos where being on public display within the YouTube community and, e.g., at Vidcon, following Donath and Boyd, thus also authenticates you as a person.

Finally, we can also regard the public display of connections as an example of what Erving Goffman in his essay *On Face-work* defines as a basic mode of "face": "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1967, p. 5). The public display of connections that Brittani and other YouTubers provide when they link to their Facebook and Twitter profiles from their YouTube channel is this positive social value in terms of authenticating them not just as who they say they are, but who they *really* are. This mode of authenticity is ultimately re-confirmed in the display of their online friends (also see Papacharissi 2009).

12.6.4 Summing up

Shout out Sundays demonstrates how videos can be built up around user-involvement. Compared to the personal Vlog, exemplified by *The Shaytards* and *CTFxC*, the proportion of users engaging in the videos through comment writing is significantly higher in *Shout out Sundays*. While 1.4-1,9% of the users in *The Shaytards* and *CTFxC* engage in comment writing, 4.7% of the viewers on average engage with the *Shout out Sundays* videos (although this proportion is only based on four videos). This indicates that the explicit integration of users by involving multiple platforms and letting the viewers have a more direct impact on the content seem to generate more traffic in terms of comment writing. When looking at all the activity, including liking, comment writing and video responding in *Shout out Sundays*, direct active user-involvement accounts for a little less than 10% of the overall views. This, however, does not account for the viewers who engage in reading comments, but it nevertheless supports the previously presented 99-9-1% rule (cf. *8.4*), as she is also one of the YouTubers with the highest proportion of user-engagement. This is not to downplay the importance of user-involvement, but to draw focus to the fact that, in regards to Brittani, user-involvement is perhaps just as much functioning as a mode of authentication – proposed through her public display of online profiles, where the act of interacting with online friends verifies her as a person as well as the online identity she presents for her viewers.

13 - The commodity Vlog

Since the commercial take over by Google Inc. in 2006, a debate has been going on regarding how to make money out of YouTube. The YouTube Partner Programme is one example of how ordinary users can make a living from YouTube, but at the same time, there is a whole range of commercial companies that have been looking for ways into the commercial market of YouTube. In previous sections, it has been demonstrated how the impression of authenticity in regards to belonging to a YouTube community as well as transparency are fundamental values of the profiles in both personal Vlogs and the Vlog Show. But authenticity can also be a vital tool for companies in order to manoeuvre and reach the YouTube community in terms of combining commodities with self-presentations. According to James Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine, today's consumers desire authentic and real experiences that furthermore are sold or presented to them by someone sincere: "People no longer accept fake offerings from slickly marketed phonies; they want real offerings from genuinely transparent sources" (2007, p. 5). In the following, I will demonstrate how the last type of Vlog described here offers a product through personal Vloggers, and how the impression of authenticity fosters both an online identity as well as a strong product. There are many different types of videos in which people demonstrate goods and purchase products, including the so-called "Haul" video[25], which primarily characterises videos of people sharing purchased items. Although, it is a widespread phenomenon on YouTube, there are only a few of the videos in the sample that can be identified as Haul videos in terms of purchasing and unwrapping a product. The commodity Vlog, however, is similar with its focus on consumption and presenting objects, but instead of purchasing or unwrapping a product, it is an implicit sales video, where the presenter is reviewing or demonstrating a product. This Vlog type may therefore overlap with the Haul video, but I will instead address it as a commodity Vlog – stressing the materialistic context of the videos.

The commodity Vlog is characterised by a person who demonstrates, reviews or reflects upon a product that is presented directly to an audience in a first-person monologue presentation. It has many similarities to the aforementioned UGC genre "How To or DIY" video, as identified in *Categorising YouTube* and in section *3.4,* but the presentation of the product is inherently linked to self-presentation and the physical presence of a subject, unlike the "How to" videos. The commodity Vlog always uses the first-person camera position in terms of the web-camera, which provides direct eye contact with the viewer.

13.1 Domination of make-up content

Twenty-nine videos were identified as commodity Vlogs. Further, 76% (22 videos) of the videos were uploaded by women that, except for one video, all focus on cosmetics or fashion products, while 6 out of the 7 videos presented by male creators are demonstrations or haul videos of Apple products. In the following, I address the issue of authenticity in a commercial context, as mentioned above, by focussing on the 21 videos that involve presentations and reviews of primarily make-up and cosmetics, which can thus also be referred to as make-up Vlogs. These videos are in most cases made by teenage girls or young women in their early twenties that like the other Vlogs types are ordinary people who upload videos about makeup, clothes and fashion. But they are at the same time in most cases sponsored videos, where companies have hired them to make a review (that in most cases is a positive one) of a product. The 21 videos presenting make-up or cosmetics also include a competition or a "giveaway", where viewers can win some of the products being presented. This is an aspect that can be found in all of the make-up Vlogs, where many videos include the word "contest" or "give away" in the title as a mode of attracting viewers. Most of these videos have a commercial agenda, and 95% of the commodity Vloggers are registered as YouTube Partners, who are earning money from YouTube in

[25] See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haul_video#cite_note-MJ-1, retrieved December 11, 2011.

terms of the amount of video traffic as well as being sponsored by companies who collaborate with the girls in order to target an already defined target audience of young females primarily between the ages of 13 and 17 (as shown in the statistical data surrounding the videos). In the coding phase, all of the commodity Vlogs were coded as non-fiction, where the didactic and expository mode of representation is clearly dominating. This is explained by the outspoken strategy of rhetorical persuasion that can be registered in most of these Vlogs.

13.2 Personalised commodities

Similar to what has previously been argued, a vital part of claiming authenticity on YouTube is to communicate belongingness to the YouTube community or YouTube culture. Most of the girls are presenting their products in a domestic setting that in most cases involve their bedroom, but there are also examples of filming in the kitchen or bathroom. This heightens the previously mentioned mode of "ordinariness" (cf. *12.2*) that ultimately communicates that the presenter is "one of us", and we can thus trust her product.

Another frequent feature of the Commodity Vlog is the involvement of autobiographical anecdotes and reflections regarding boys, clothes and school. This makes the videos significantly different from, e.g., sales programmes such as *TV-shopping* or *TV-shop*. It becomes clear that it is not only about selling or reviewing products, but just as much about the experience of a personal meeting with an individual who invites us into her house creating a mediated impression of intimacy. Whether or not this is a deliberate strategy will not be discussed here, but the presence of a domestic and autobiographical layer add an extra element to the product, since viewers not only identify with the product, but also with a personal narrative that becomes inherently linked to the products as a mode of verification. This can be illustrated with the video *School Organization/Essentials + Win Supplies!,* made by *MacBarbie07*, who while explaining how to prepare for school also reflects upon her own situation of being home-schooled. The video is recorded in her bedroom, and elements of her private life appear in the background (e.g., a copy of the Eiffel Tower, teddy bears, posters, a television and pink pillows), which situates her in a domestic setting, adding an impression of intimacy and privacy to the setup, thus making the presentation of the products significantly different from, e.g., *TV-shopping*. The bedroom was one of the locations that Richard Chalfen noticed was excluded in his registrations of home movies (cf. 1987, p. 63), because the recorded activities are normally shot on location (ibid.), and in the natural surroundings of the person filming. In most of the home movies analysed by Chalfen, filming was done by the father of the family, while the majority of creators in the commodity Vlogs are teenage girls, whose identity is thus visually documented when filming "on location" in their bedrooms.

The location of the bedroom also reflects on the audience's own everyday life, and the set-up simulates an intimate conversation among friends reinforced by the intimate direct eye-contact between the Vlogger and her viewer, situated in the private bedroom of the presenter, which furthermore naturalises the involvement of personal reflections and anecdotes. In her "going back to school" video, *MacBarbie07* reflects upon her own personal situation being "home schooled", implicitly encouraging the viewers to respond to this, which many of the viewers do, as can be seen in many of the comments posted to the video, responding by writing about their own experiences. In this situation, YouTube functions as an extension of the teenager's private bedroom, where intimacy is turned public and creates a sense of public privacy that authenticates her as a real person and users, similar to the case of *BrittaniLouiseTaylor*, create social ties around the commodities. In the video *July Favourites*, the Vlogger *meganheartsmakeup* integrates her personal background, and the video thus demonstrates how the presentations of products are combined with personal anecdotes of her dog, while she at the same time puts the dog on her lap, just like she reflects upon her relationship with her boyfriend. The video illustrates how the products are presented and combined with a personal narrative that is not just

selling a product, but selling a story that is combined with the opportunity to interact and win as well as become visible on YouTube.

Another characteristic of the commodity Vlog is what can be considered an amateurishness or the previously mentioned "low-grade" style in many of the videos in comparison to standardised formulas of editing and filming (cf. *10.1*). The standards of producing content with the emergence of digital cameras and inbuilt editing programmes have been noticeably improved since the Super8 camcorder movies of the 1980s and early 1990s, which makes it even more noticeable when standard conventions are ignored, especially in the editing process.

While many of the commodity Vlogs begin with an animated intro sequence (which the creators did most likely not make themselves), most of them are filmed with fundamentally bad lighting, and with the camera being out of focus, just like many of them ignore disturbing elements such as disruptive background noise, intruding parents or clothes falling down. In the video *MAC STEREO ROSE GIVEAWAY!*, the sound is out of sync, the camera is out of focus and the video stops because the presenter's computer ran out of battery. The example is a common feature among all types of UGC, just as it has been demonstrated how personal Vlogs also downplay standardised modes of producing (cf. *3.7, 10.2*). The most obvious explanation is that most of the female presenters are ordinary girls who had no training in proper lighting or how to put the camera on manual focus, and hence the amateur style also authenticates them as ordinary persons. This is perhaps also a consequence of what can be regarded as digital autonomy, where accessibility and control over content have resulted in self-defined idiosyncratic modes of producing, similar to what Jose van Dijck argues: "digital tools appear to give the individual amateur more autonomy and power" (2005, p. 33).

13.3 Involving self-reflexivity

Self-reflexivity is also a frequent feature of the commodity Vlog and can be found when the presenters reflect upon change of locations, lack of light, their other channels etc. For example, in the video *Solutions that Stick: Review (pt. 2*), *LinzLoves* begins her video by talking about how she has changed location and how she has been filming at many different locations, but now found some nice curtains and decided to go with that.

A unique mode of self-reflection within the commodity Vlogs is seen in how many videos add an extra scene – entitled "bloopers" or "mistakes", that is, a collection of clips going behind the scene of the presentation of the product which we just saw. Most of the commodity Vlogs adopt a somewhat serious tone and, in terms of persuading the viewers of the product's validity, they apply a didactic instructional mode of communication that also provides them with an authority, which seems to conflict with a last scene of bloopers. With the addition of the bloopers, the product's validity becomes just as much linked with the subject's ability to present herself as sincere, where adding a layer of meta-comments results in transparency that again suggests ordinariness and confirms what we already know: that these presenters are also ordinary girls going to school and living at home with their parents just like their viewers. Simultaneously, the inclusion of bloopers reveals autonomy and turns attention away from the video's commercial context of the professional company sponsoring the video.

One of the most effective and most common ways is to declare themselves independent and express that they are in control of the their videos. Many of the videos include comments on their independence from the cosmetic companies and that they will only be reviewing or recommending the product they truly believe in, as stated by *MakeupByTiffanyD* in her video *Contest! Sigma Brushes & Travel Kit Review:*

> I would not have shown you them and raved over them (…) if haven't had loved them and thought they were worth it (00:54-01:04).

As she has said goodbye to the audience, the video uses a fade down/up to jump behind the stage as we meet the presenter again. She is now having a conversation with a man standing behind the camera. The situation simulates a behind the scene clip, where they have forgotten to turn off the camera and it thus establishes a Middle-Region space, where the setting is identical, but she is no longer addressing the camera, but the person somewhere behind the camera including a mediated back-region bias. The gestures show a more relaxed and funny version of the presenter with her arms behind her head (cf. Figure 67), who jokes with the person behind the camera as they talk about how to improve the show, as he suggest to include some "trivia questions", and she responds by rejecting his idea: "that idea is so dumb!" (15:04).

Figure 67: *A side-stage view behind the scene*

The Middle-Region space moreover establishes a pro-filmic layer to the video that somewhat underlines her sincere declaration in the beginning of the video, as quoted above, since it also becomes a confirmation of the fact that she is in control and *she* decides how to make the video.

13.4 Physical presence

People on YouTube in most cases can easily be physically identified and anonymity does not occur in the Vlog. As stated by Donath and Boyd, "the body anchors identity, making it both singular and difficult to change" (2004, p. 73). This is perhaps no surprise and not something unique for YouTube, but in comparison to other social networks sites, physical appearance is highly important and something that is not communicated as transparent as are other aspects of the self. It is noticeable how some personal Vloggers such as Shay in *The Shaytards* or *PhillipDeFranco* have no problems performing in public space, but both of them on several occasions are hiding aspects of their physical appearance (e.g., Shay who in several videos is in a swimming pool or at the beach refuses to take off his t-shirt and *PhillipDeFranco*, even though an on-going theme in his Vlog is losing weight, has chosen not show any aspect of this), while the framing of the face has become a somewhat standardised mode of verifying the self as physically present on YouTube. In regards to the commodity Vlog, the static camera also creates a framing solely of the face, which is why the first-person camera position is the perfect tool for presenting make-up products that are only visualised through the face.

In the commodity Vlogs in this sample, there is only one example of a female creator who presents herself without wearing makeup, although in general there are several of these videos on YouTube. In a video called ~ *Bollywood/Arabic Inspired Style* ~, the creator *MakeupGeekTV* presents herself both with and without make-up, although it is only half of her face. The video is a tutorial of how to put on the specific make-up that she also sells on her webpage. There is a clear effect of this physical transformation, where the step-by-step transformation is used as a persuasive strategy to demonstrate the effect of the product. The transformation contributes to an impression of authenticity in terms of transparency by letting the audience follow the process of transformation, where we access both what can be regarded as a physical back-stage appearance as well as the end-position, the stylised version of the self in a physical front-region position. As argued previously, this does not make the stylised front-region presentation less authentic, because it corresponds to the communicative situation analogous to other standard public appearances in a direct first-person position, like television news hosts and models in advertisements, who also present what we can regard as a stylised idealised images. This physical appearance thus can be regarded similar to the idealised family portrait that *The Shaytards* present for their viewers and which exemplifies Goffman's "impression management", where the presenters are being judged by their performative role in the specific context or what Meyrowitz speaks of as social behaviour as contextualised by a "social truth", which is adjusted and judged in the specific situation. This can, e.g., be illustrated with a comparison to Shane Dawson in *Shane,* who is regarded as more authentic in terms of his slovenly physical appearance, because it supports the intimate and personal setting that he presents himself in, just like the female presenters are being authentic in terms of their physical appearances legitimised by their social role as presenters of a cosmetic product.

13.5 Selling a personalised narrative: An example of a commodity Vlog

The most subscribed and most popular commodity Vlogger *Juicystar07* is an excellent example of how the commodity is also authenticated by the involvement of personal anecdotes. *JuicyStar07* is one of the most subscribed individuals on YouTube, with more than 850,000 subscribers and like Shane Dawson has been nominated to a *Teen-choice Award* on *Fox* TV.

Her videos are among the most discussed videos on YouTube. This is, however, mainly because many of them involve competitions were subscribers participate by writing as many comments as possible. This results in videos with a very high number of comments that, however, consist of people writing the same comment ("Enter me!!") hundreds of times. The embedded competition format by allowing an endless amount of comments does contribute to the promotion of the video and the visibility of *Juicystar07* as a YouTuber. This strategy of using the comments to increase traffic and thus visibility around the video is copied in most of the commodity Vlogs, as very clearly described in the video *1,000 Subscribers Urban Decay Makeup Giveaway!* created by *Brittanimakeup*: "if you write 'Enter me' twenty times instead of one …it's like… your chances are better!" (3:08). This strategy also explains why another video, *Contest! Sigma Makeup Brushes Giveaway (Over $1000 in prizes!!!)*, made by *MakeupByTiffanyD*, can have only 30,000 views and more than 230,000 comments. In contrast to both the personal Vlog and the Vlog Show, visibility in the case of the commodity Vlog predominantly is established through the use of YouTube's statistics and traffic and less in terms of performative social behaviour.

In *Juicystar07*'s video *Win a $500 American Express Gift Card and MyClyns Germ Protection Spray,* the creator is presenting a sponsored gift card and a so-called "Germ Spray". Her video is one of the most discussed on YouTube of *all time*, with more than 1 million comments, where users write hundreds or even thousands of comments each. The video is recorded in her bedroom as shown in the figure below:

Figure 68: *Domestic location*

And like the case of *MacBarbie07's* "home-school" video mentioned in the previous section, *Juicystar07* can be authenticated through her domestic settings, as we are led to understand that this is in fact her bedroom or at least a stereotyped female teenager's room, dominated by pink colours, a pink teddy bear hanging in the background, a mirror and makeup products as well as clothes hanging on the wall in the background.

She moreover begins the video with a reflection on the lighting in the video, since she is filming at night, as well as how the product relates to her from a personal perspective: "you guys know that I get sick all the time, especially if you follow me on Twitter" (01:12), and she goes on with a long anecdote on how she got sick the last time and she for first time will reveal how she got some "bacterium col". At the same time, the Twitter reference functions as a public display of social connections (cf. *12.6.3*), where the reference confirms her statement about being sick, since, following Donath and Boyd (2004), we assume her Twitter-followers would disagree if this statement was false, and the link thus implicitly authenticates her as a real person.

The video is situated in personal and private settings, and we are introduced to the product by a personal reflection. Following this personal reflection, she introduces the review of a "germ protection spray" and the product's validity gets confirmed, as she states that she is no longer sick. She also demonstrates how it does not ruin her makeup and she furthermore tells us "my dad is actually a doctor and I had him look this over (…) and he said to me scientifically it is suppose to work" (05:31), while she tells an anecdote of how her father used it in a mall. This video demonstrates an efficient mode of persuasion in terms of personal anecdotes, where the "expert" is not only an unknown witness, but also her father, who is an authority both as a doctor and a father. In that sense, *Juicystar07* not only verifies the product but furthermore makes it a personal, intimate product that as argued furthermore can be verified by providing links to her personal Vlog and Twitter profile, which authenticates her online identity.

Similar to other commodity Vlogs, *Juicystar07* also includes "bloopers and outtakes" in her videos, where viewers can watch her make mistakes. Just like the previous examples of reflexivity creating a Middle-Region space, this last part of the video functions as a verification and emphasis of her as a real person playing two roles: one as a Vlogger presenting cosmetic products, and the other as an ordinary teenager. Again this evokes a sense of sincerity and transparency that is supported by the text on her channel:

- I always disclose if a video is sponsored or if a product was sent for free. I give 100% honest reviews. If I do not like a product I try, I will not review it (cf. http://www.youtube.com/user/juicystar07).

A mode of sincerity is also introduced in the video *Win A $250 American Express Gift Card + Jovan "Satisfaction"*, as she tells her viewers it is a sponsored video that she in fact did not want to do:

> But then I thought I couldn't pass it up, because it is something, somebody else is going to win (…) I said to myself, if I really like the product, I will go ahead and do it, but if its not even worth reviewing, I am not going to do the contest, but *this* is definitely worth a review (00:30-00:52).

This statement provides the video with a sincere and personal perspective because she is in control of what she is presenting and it leaves the audience with the impression that she sincerely believes it is a good product. At the same time she addresses her affection for her viewers, as she is basically doing this sponsored video for them, even though she does not want to. In that sense, she provides an impression of herself as a person who is not playing a staged role of selling a product, but by giving her sincere opinion she thus also strengthens the product's brand as she links it with her own personal commitment. This mode of sincerity is also reinforced by her family anecdotes on how her mother likes the smell of the product and has started wearing it herself, just like her dad who normally only buys expensive colognes, but very much enjoys the male-version of the perfume set she is presenting.

In *Win a $100 American Express Gift Card! + Certain Dri Anti-Perspirant Review*, *Juicystar07* states that she does not want to talk about the "Dri anti-perspirant" deodorant, because she is embarrassed. Nonetheless she feels obligated, since as she says: "there are probably a lot of girls out there that do not know about this and would really be beneficial for them" (1:23). Identical to the previous videos, she elaborates on the product through a personal anecdote and reflection on herself, her scepticism and embarrassment with purchasing these products until she found out that they really worked. Again, this is of course a sponsored video, where she is paid to sell a product, but at the same time it is a self-presentation where the authentic impression of her role also verifies the product. In this example, an impression of authenticity is created through the performative act of recording, because by making the video she simultaneously publishes something intimate and authentic about herself that she would otherwise not disclose, but she does the video in order to acknowledge her audience and "sacrifice" herself to make the video for them even though she thinks is embarrassing.

Whether or not this is a sales-trick is irrelevant, since her viewers clearly regard it as authentic and the examples shows how the commodity Vlog also involves aspects of self-presentation as rhetorical tool of persuasion, which through the involvement of the personal reflection communicates an impression of authenticity. A glance at the comments reveals no critiques, but grateful comments that thank her for her videos as well as contributing with their own experiences with the product. This also indicates her video is being positively consumed and associated with her as a person. The videos of *Juicystar07* registered in this sample are found in the most discussed group and they indicate a very high user-involvement, of course primarily explained by the structure of the competition that lead users to increase their chances of winning by the number of written comments, but also because many of them identity with *Juicystar07* as a person.

13.6 Summing up

The commodity Vlog is the best example of how personal self-presentations exist as commodities and commercially targeted audiovisual texts. They combine the social aspects of sharing commodities with the physical presence of a female presenter, who although always good-looking and stylised also represents an everydayness emphasised either by the domestic settings, autobiographical anecdotes or by the reflexive layers that draw attention to the construction of the text and thus on the pro-filmic reality. The ordinariness of the videos reinforces the impression of how being honest is a principal value of the commodity Vlog and uniquely fits with the YouTube platform, which also provides links to the products and merchandise, and in that sense directly links the videos with the products they are selling. Another consistent characteristic is the competition or give-away that all of the videos integrate as a part of their strategy to attract attention and traffic to their channel. The commodity Vlog also attracts attention in terms of its functionality as a tutorial or demonstration video, where viewers can gain new knowledge that also entitles the presenters with an authoritative identity.

Finally, the commodity Vlog is also the most homogenous Vlog form, where all of the videos, although made by individual creators, include user-activity via competitions and basically follow the same standards of presenting these competitions. Further, the use of autobiographic elements and rhetorical persuasion are identical in many of the videos, as well as the integration of bloopers at the end of the videos is a consistent feature. It is beyond the scope of the dissertation to further investigate this, but an interesting perspective on this Vlog mode is the gender specify in relationship to the homogeneity of the content across many individual creators, where females creator to a certain extent have created their own genre, while both personal Vlogs and Vlog Shows although male-dominated, also include female presenters, where the presentation of the self is much more divergent.

14 – Analysing identity in UGC: A summing up

In the analyses presented in this dissertation, three types of Vlogs were distinguished on the basis of their distinctive communication about the self. The personal Vlog was the most frequent type, as well as representing the most explicit articulation of the self in comparison to the other types, both in terms of its consequent emphasis on the autobiographical and personal and its dynamic style, which involved other participants (e.g. family members and friends). The Vlog Show was characterised by a more staged version of the self that in most examples involved the role of a host, as well as frequently involving short scenes, where presenters also adopted fictional characters. The third type was the commodity Vlog, which combined personal self-presentations with didactic and rhetorical persuasion in terms of presenting a product. It was also the most homogenous type, often involving user-interactive competitions, and in most cases this type was created by female Vloggers.

These three types, however, share an emphasis on authenticity as a basic value that ultimately situates the Vlogger as a real person, while authenticity simultaneously can be defined by the specific communicative context. For example, the impression of authenticity in regards to the YouTube host is not solely about personal reflections, but is just as much about the ability to perform authentically as a host. The personal Vlog, on the other hand, first and foremost reflects authenticity in regards to situating the presenter in the personal environment and includes autobiographical verification. Finally, the commodity Vlog incorporates the personal environment in order to authenticate the self, but also to authenticate the product being presented.

The three types of Vlogs also share the embedding of self-reflexivity, in that all frequently include self-reflexive layers. In regards to the personal Vlog, self-reflexivity serves the function of authenticating the existence of a real person behind the often staged performative behaviour adopted for the camera and the audience. In terms of the Vlog Show, self-reflexivity is embedded in the videos and allows the audience to distinguish between performative displays of acting skills, or the role of a host, and the real person behind the character or host. Finally, in the commodity Vlog, self-reflexivity also serves the function of authenticating the presentation of the product, in that it works as a reminder of the presenter's everydayness, distancing her or him from the commercial context of the product.

Another consistent feature of the three Vlog types is the establishment of "para-social interactions". Several of the examples demonstrated different ways viewers feel personally connected to the people in the videos and share their own experiences of everyday life. In some cases, there were also examples of mediated intimacy in which viewers felt personally connected. One characteristic of this is the specific style of the Vlog that addresses viewers in a direct and intimate one-to-one situation, wherein YouTube as a media platform, moreover, provides the impression of an unfettered contact between the creator and the audience. A second and perhaps more important aspect regarding the establishment of para-social interactions is the concrete articulation of a YouTube community that creators and viewers share. Identification with the YouTube community takes place in different ways and on different levels in terms of social status, but nonetheless there is a shared group identity of belonging to a YouTube community, including shared cultural references and knowledge about other YouTubers. At the same time, Vloggers adopt roles in terms of social performance, assuming the identity of a Vlogger, which is moreover a profession and what legitimatises their self-presentation in a performative and mediated context. This reflects the fact that identity also needs to be visible; hence identity on YouTube is very much about performing the self. Thus, it has been argued that social behaviour within the content is tied to performances and presenting the self in front of an audience, which in the Vlog is furthermore an overt part of the direct communication from the creator to his or her audience.

14.1 Other modes of self-presentation

In the previous analysis, a rather limited aspect of the overall sample with 900 videos was involved. But as the intention was to study audiovisual self-presentations in UGC, the focus was reduced to a sub-sample of only UGC (473 videos) and from these I further chose to focus on the most explicit modes of self-presentations. Thus, I included 215 Vlogs in the analyses, which moreover were divided into three different types. The personal Vlog was the most prevalent form, as well as the most explicit example of online identity on YouTube. Nonetheless, what the Vlogs share across the three types, as well with most of the UGC from the sample, is the articulation of self-displays, in which people exist both explicitly and implicitly through their videos that equip them with an online identity. Further, visibility is a fundamental aspect of online existence, as argued in section *4.9*, and throughout the analyses. This means that all self-presentations are presented in this context

There are other types of self-display evident in other forms of UGC, such as in Musical Performances, YouTube Moments, Fictional Shorts and Parodies. In Musical Performances, the self is displayed not in terms of social skills or personality, but in a more traditional mode of performance, similar to Shane Dawson's or Brittani Louise Taylor's acting skills. Thus, these are displays of social performances and are transformations of the self in order to demonstrate certain personal skills. YouTube Moments are more distinct forms of self-displays in terms of cultural taste. Uploaders who display these types of videos address a shared understanding of what is good and bad taste, or what is funny and not-funny. This aspect was also mentioned in the analysis of *RayWilliamJohnson* and his viewers, where the display of "cool" taste by sending videos and sharing the ironic distance towards them indicate a shared belongingness and group-identity cf. *12.5*).

By uploading a video that shows the excessive or funny behaviour of other people, the aspects of socialising and sharing content furthermore reveal an online cultural existence that can be shared with other users, in most cases on Facebook, where videos are embedded as modes of socialisation and displays of cultural identity and taste. This is also reflected in UGC that can be identified as a Parody. Parodies are creative expressions of comic skills as well as individual taste, in terms of what is being parodied; thus, e.g., some famous people are more frequently parodied than others (e.g., Justin Bieber or Miley Cyrus), such that making a parody of these people involves an ironic distance that simultaneously reveals aspects of cultural taste.

UGC types like Fictional Shorts or Artistic and Lyrical UGC reveal aesthetic or creative skills that can be considered examples of performative skills of expression, similar to Musical Performances, rather than performative skills of communicating like the personal Vlog. Performative skills of expression present the self through the act of being good at a particular skill, which is also reflected in the How-to and DIY genre, where various skills, such as, painting, editing or building something are displayed. In that sense, we can identify two concepts of the performative, cited by Marvin Carlson (also in *The Performative Way of YouTube*), who states that performances can be identified as "the display of skills" (1996, p. 4), which is most obvious in Musical Performances, Fictional Shorts, Artistic and Lyrical, How-to, DIY and Parodies. They can be identified as more traditional performances that demonstrate particular skills. The second concept suggested by Carlson is the performance of the self as social behaviour, and it involves skills of "a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behaviour" (ibid, p. 5). While the former can be identified in several examples of UGC included in this sample, it is the latter which dominates this sample and is included in most UGC that is related to the presentation of the self. With the large predominance of Vlogs, identified as 45% of the registered UGC (cf. *3.2*), there is a preponderance of online identity related to social performative behaviour that is concerned with skills that in regards to YouTube are apparent in the ability to successfully perform and communicate the self.

14.2 A sample of popular content

As the sample is derived from the most popular content on YouTube, it can be argued that we would most likely not identify any examples of videos that fail to perform. One way or the other, the videos gathered for this sample display successful performances. A successful performance refers to a video that has gained visibility both in terms of having an entertaining and authentic performer, but also in terms of social behaviour that evokes controversial issues or emotional excess that results in many reactions and makes viewers share the video. In this sample, it must be noted that most of the videos furthermore were created by YouTube Partners, who are getting paid for making videos. This of course is not tantamount to the suspicion that all creators are motivated by visibility in terms of commercial and economic benefit. However, it nevertheless leaves an underlying awareness of the audience that can be identified in the performative behaviour which seems to have become a basic standard of the social role of YouTubing. This also means there is an enormous amount of content on the perimeters of YouTube, not examined in this dissertation, where creators who are not making money from producing videos most likely can be found and whose inclusion in this study might have provided a less homogenous picture of YouTube. The current study first and foremost identifies performative behaviour as a fundamental characteristic of UGC within the popular sphere of YouTube.

This perhaps also is mirrored in the depiction of an idealised version of everyday life, or as stated in the analysis of *The Shaytards*: "of life as it should be" (cf. *11.1.5*). Although, there are examples of more serious and negative issues, most depictions of everyday life are positive and joyful portrayals that users find funny, which of course underlines that YouTube is very much entertainment. But they are also depictions of real lives, and furthermore there are relatively few videos coded as fiction in the sample. This is an aspect of creator control; i.e., creators decide themselves which version of the self they present online. But as argued, because this sample consists of the most popular content, this implicitly indicates that the audiences agree with these versions by liking and viewing the videos (which thus positions the videos among the most popular) or discussing them (this does not mean necessarily the audience likes them, although this is the case in most examples). Audiences thus seem to accept the idealistic version of life, which perhaps can be explained by the stronger relations viewers build with the video creators. In contrast, most viewers feel distanced from the social actors in reality television, e.g., as argued by Kilborn, who states that for a lot of reality TV, the basic attraction is "the provision of a voyeuristic experience, in which part of the appeal is witnessing the humiliation of others" (2003, p. 76). Through the aforementioned style of the Vlogs and how audiences are being addressed, viewers cannot take on the role of voyeurs when being directly spoken to as well as involved. This perhaps explains how viewers of a great deal of UGC find it easier to identify with and are more easily entertained by idealised versions of lives, as they are also being reminded through self-reflexivity that everything is mediated. A final aspect of the acceptance and identification with how "life should be" is perhaps also related to the fact that most of the viewers are teenagers or people under the age of 24 (cf. Figure 20, p. 75).

Identity in regards to people between 13-24 is inherently linked to the experiences of adolescence and to the process of finding out "who one is" (cf. Huffaker et al. 2005, p. 2). Personal Vlogs, such as *The Shaytards*, *CTFxC* or *Shane*, all present versions of happy families, with whom many viewers presumably can reflect and compare to their own everyday experiences of family life or how they dream their own lives should be. It is, however, beyond the scope of this study to provide a fulfilling analysis of this aspect.

14.3 A first generation of entrepreneurs

The analysis also described a specific YouTube style, which is perhaps related to a specific generation of first-time creators who have not previously made audiovisual content and more noticeably who have had little training in producing. This has resulted in a specific mode of communicating and presentation of the self on YouTube, and which can partly be explained as a consequence of technological developments and YouTube's role as a media platform.

As argued earlier, a line can be drawn from the Direct Cinema of the 1960s, when the emergence of light and mobile cameras resulted in a specific type of content and basically a whole generation of filmmakers, who with a small budget also set new standards of filmmaking, including Direct Cinema within documentaries and more significantly the French *Nouvelle Vague*. In a similar context, we can recognise how the technological development of video formats in the 1980s and early 1990s resulted in a specific home movie style that with the emergence of digital cameras (e.g., the DV format) also was adopted in professional independent filmmaking (cf. Dovey 2004). In a similar way, the emergence of UGC on YouTube can be regarded as corresponding to the technological development of pocket cameras and mobile phones with cameras that, in terms of mobility, usability and economy, appeal especially to a widespread group of young people, who otherwise would never have become video producers. On YouTube, millions of young people in particular have now gained access to audiovisual video production and the act of YouTubing has become a common term in our media culture. Consequently, this has also resulted in the emergence of a whole generation of producers who have accessed online video production and thus a unique opportunity of creating self-images that before the emergence of YouTube or other streaming platforms only existed on a much smaller scale. These producers are not trained, nor have they learned any pre-defined skills of creating content, but in most cases are autodidactic entrepreneurs or what we can refer to as the "first generation" of YouTubers. They seem to have a set a new standard for communicating on YouTube, where professionalisation and dramatisation of reality have been replaced by a low-grade and direct, intimate style that many YouTubers, rather than trying to hide or downplay, constantly draw attention to. Here self-reflexivity appears as explicit strategies or modes of expression that, as argued in the previous section, also signal belongingness to a shared community of entrepreneurs that separates them from other types of content.

Although far from all viewers are active producers of content, mediated communication seems to increasingly have become a common mode of communication and a mode of presenting the self online. This is perhaps also a reflection of the integration of digital media in everyday life. Mediated communication is not necessarily understood as in opposition to face-to-face communication in terms of authenticity (also see Hjarvard 2002). Mediated communication, with the emergence of social media and mediated face-to-face communication (e.g., through Skype), embeds the principals of direct interpersonal communication. Or as Klaus Bruhn Jensen has suggested, we should perhaps ask "what is the medium of face-to-face interaction" (2010, p. 65), thus implying how media have gradually extended human embodied communication to be performed in a mediated context as well. It has been suggested that mediated interpersonal communication can be regarded almost as physical contact between Shane Dawson and his viewers; Dawson has built an intimate relationship between himself and his fans, in which physical embodied face-to-face communication has been replaced by the mediated intimacy that only exists online.

14.4 The multiple and connected self

In regards to the Vlogs, it has been noted how the presentation of the self and online identity are not limited to a single channel or platform, but involve multiple selves with individually distinctive functions on different channels and media platforms. Furthermore, this involves the presentation of

the self on various channels beyond the limits of YouTube. As can be illustrated with a picture of the YouTuber *RayWilliamJohnson* below, his online identity not only consists of his YouTube Vlog Show, but also presentations of the self on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, iTunes as well as a website and a Personal Vlog:

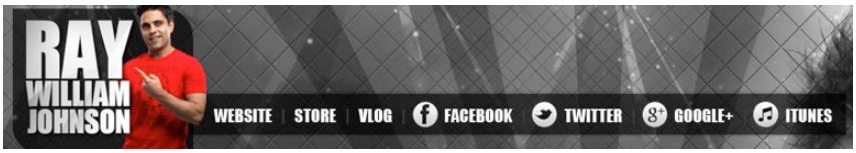


Figure 69: *Frame grab from RayWilliamJohnson's YouTube channel retrieved November 2011*

There are also many links within the videos to other videos, which besides being a navigating feature also articulate what in the analysis of *BrittaniLouiseTaylor*, citing Donath and Boyd (2004), have been characterised as a "public display of connections". With the exhibition of social connections, the individual can verify and authenticate her or his identity – accordingly, the individual is implicitly confirmed by online friends, because when viewers can detect the presence of other people, they implicitly expect these other people to reveal and verify the public subject.

It is evident, furthermore, that many creators of other types of UGC, e.g., the registered fictional shorts and parodies, also embed a public display of connections through links to the people behind the videos (for example, *relannoyingorange*, *TotallySketch*, *nigahiga*, *Collegehumor* and *smosh*), where buttons embedded on YouTuber's channels, like the ones of *Smosh*'s channels, have become recent standard features of the YouTube channel and thus also a standard identity marker.

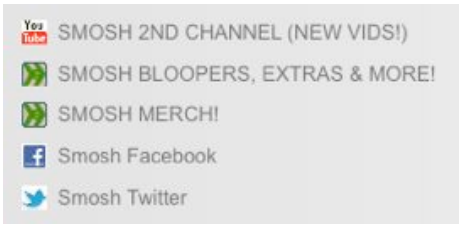


Figure 70: *Links to Smosh's public display of connections*

Here the creators are primarily authenticated in the para-texts of the video, where viewers can visit a personalised Facebook profile or a Twitter profile, which documents that a real person within the YouTube community has made the specific video. This is not only limited to YouTube, but has recently become embedded in many public and private websites and other social network sites.

14.5 The future of YouTube

Although the sample only consists of videos observed in 2010, I have been monitoring and watching content on YouTube regularly over the three-year period of this study. If the sample had been extended to involve a focus on specific channels over time, arguments regarding the development of YouTube could have been enhanced through a comparative analysis of videos over time. This, however, was not the intention; rather, the goal was to present an understanding of identity formation on YouTube based on registrations of a specific period of time. A distinction of the analysis over time would have potentially enabled more divergence in the content, but such arguments would still be limited to a specific period of time that again would have been different in comparison to, e.g., a five-year period. The concept of identity on YouTube is dynamic and constantly evolving, as also argued in

the aforementioned dialogical relationship between creators, context and viewers, which makes the argument of comparative analysis somewhat irrelevant in regards to the overall arguments of the texts. Finally, temporal distinctions were embedded in the design of the sample in terms of nine different browsing categories with three temporal distinctions.

But considering that YouTube has changed its design and format several times throughout this study, it would be expected that by examining YouTube in early 2012, there would be differences in comparison with the same channels in 2010. One noticeable distinction between television and YouTube series is the consistency, as many of these channels can only be taken off-air when the creators themselves decide to do so. This also means that many of the creators analysed in 2010, and in even earlier studies of YouTube, with content dating back to 2007 (cf. Burgess and Green 2009), are still active and equally popular. This also indicates a predominance of a rather narrow group of creators, who seem to continue to dominate the popular sphere of YouTube, partly due to the site's hierarchical organisation of content (cf. *Categorising YouTube* and *8.7, 8.8*). As briefly touched upon in regards to *RayWilliamJohnson*, there is also a general, noticeable progression of professionalisation of UGC, both within the technological developments of the series as they get more and more popular, but also with a merging and adaptation of television cultures, they tend to involve more people and larger production sets, which is also the case for *The Shaytards*. At the end of 2011, however, *The Shaytards* still follows the same concepts they introduced in late 2008. Nonetheless, it has become noticeably more commercialised in the sense that the children have become frequent actors in commercials and there is no longer just one camera, but always three to four people filming the same situation, as most of the family members have made spin-off in terms of their own Vlog channels.

Without going into the moral aspects of online self-exposure, the developments of YouTube somewhat insinuate how visibility on YouTube seems to be gradually moving into everyday life, where an overt risk is the ability or will to stop filming or to become invisible again. Vlogging has become not only a profession, but also an identity that is confirmed and exists in terms of visibility. As previously argued, identity is "seen doing", which perhaps can be illustrated with examples of *The Shaytards*, who despite appearing to be a well-functioning family, also implicitly reflect this visibility, where especially the children are no longer fighting for their parents' attention, but for the camera's attention and have themselves become mediated personalities, demonstrating how identity and reality have been invaded by media. This ultimately raises the fundamental ethical issue of media influence on adolescence and childhood, which echoes Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (also see Kilborn 2003, pp. 157).

The difference is, of course, that YouTube has provided the creators with the control of themselves and their public self-images, which has also excluded exploration and voyeurism, leaving creators to construct the version of reality they choose, as long as it provides the impression of authenticity.

14.6 Summing up

The analyses first and foremost have been concerned with the Vlogs as concrete examples of mediators of audiovisual identities on YouTube, while other modes have only superficially been investigated. However, if we apply some overall headings to UGC and the impact of YouTube as a media platform, the most significant characteristic is the standardised mediated performance of everyday life. Media are deeply integrated in all aspects of the social behaviour of performers and how we must understand the self as a public identity. YouTube has grown from its grass-roots DIY amateur culture towards a professional manufactory of online versions of the self that exist in social relationships between creators and audiences; at the same time, public self-images have become embedded in a commodity culture that gains its production value in the ability to present us with authentic and real identities in a mediated reality. Here the presence of the camera and its alteration of reality no longer result in distance and non-authentic experiences of everyday life. Nobody questions the interfering camera or demands objective representations of reality. The mediated world of YouTube and its performers are in many ways real, which thus challenges the argument that face-to-face communication is considered inherently more authentic.

The belongingness to this somewhat blurred YouTube community is perhaps the most important way of authenticating the self. The community, in its widest definition, besides the shared cultural references, is also characterised by ordinariness ("you are like the rest of us"), the low-grade style and the communication of transparency (e.g., through self-reflexivity) as well as frequent acknowledgment (the YouTube "we") and involvement of viewers. This can be summarised to what for many YouTubers are the principles of communicating yourself and what defines the self as a creator of UGC. Thus what ultimately characterises identity formation on YouTube is the task of authenticating yourself as a real person within the YouTube community.

15. Conclusion

This dissertation examined many different aspects of YouTube that overall were aimed at understanding how audiovisual identities are constructed and presented on YouTube and more specifically in the YouTube Vlogs, and how YouTube as a media platform influenced this. This was first and foremost an analytical task, where the content analysis inspired approach served as a fundament for this. The concrete use of the content analysis in the current study was an approach towards an extended content analysis as proposed by, e.g., Krippendorff (2004) and Herring (2004). This approach proved to be suitable, as the involvement of more subjective codes of categorisation could be more easily applied to the interface design and features of YouTube.

The empirical investigation of the 900 videos provided the dissertation with several important observations. The empirical sample drew a picture of the most popular content of YouTube at a specific point in time, from which I have been able to discuss and analyse how identity formation on YouTube takes place. The sample revealed a dominance of UGC. The sample furthermore indicated the Vlogs were by far the most widespread type of UGC. Although only observable tendencies, the sample revealed a predominance of non-fiction, a performative mode of communication, as well as consistent use of self-reflexivity and intertextuality. Many of these elements have been discussed in the theoretical framework, as well as demonstrated in the analysis of Vlogs. But as the methodological approach also demonstrates, when making arguments about YouTube, only a small aspect and a specific function of YouTube is being addressed. While this study has focused on the most popular content on YouTube consumed through streaming, YouTube simultaneously exists as an enormous media-archive, facilitating content for millions of people who do not only use YouTube as a replacement for television, but as a supplement and a resource. Readers who use YouTube in this way perhaps will not recognise the aspects of identity formation that I have addressed in this dissertation. This thus underlines what has previously been argued; i.e., every study of YouTube provides us with a new understanding of the site (also see Burgess and Green 2009, Strangelove 2010).

It was also argued in *Categorising YouTube* how the empirical investigation moreover served to explain the mechanisms of navigating on YouTube. Without the empirical fundament, the task of navigating through the content of YouTube and attempting to present a representative sample of the most popular content on YouTube would not have been possible, especially when the analytical focus was on the content and as opposed to the reception.

By adapting elements from a medium theory framework, YouTube could be examined as a media platform, which provided the subsequent analysis with a fundament for understanding the impact of YouTube both in terms of its affordances as well as its hierarchical structure and interface. The site was discussed in comparison to television; several reports indicated a co-existence between the Internet and television, and rather than replacing old media, television exists in a co-existing and interrelated relationship with YouTube, where the notion of "remediation" usefully describes this relationship. The analysis also elaborated on how many of the Vlogs remediate previous forms of communication, but at the same time presented and distributed it fundamentally different. It was argued that YouTube content was influenced by the site's affordances, where I consider *accessibility* and *user-control* in particular as two fundamental characteristics that directly influence the content. This influence can be noticed both in terms of the dominance of UGC on the site, but also through the selective and specific versions of everyday life that were depicted in the content.

At the same time, YouTube's competitive environment also affects the content and the social behaviour within the content; in the analysis, as well as in the articles, it was argued that YouTube's interface and organisation of content can be reflected in the performative behaviour and its modes of

user-involvement within the content, and which furthermore were manifested in the identification of two modes of visibility (cf. *8.9*). Overall, it was argued that YouTube in a sense also provides the specific identities that are influenced and constructed in the affordances and commercial structure of the site, as well as its technological development and specific YouTube style, which were discussed in the analysis. Further, it was emphasised that the articulation and belongingness to a YouTube community authenticate the self as well as the identity as a professional Vlogger.

One underlying notion throughout this project is the co-existence of two ideological understandings of YouTube. On the one hand, YouTube is an example of user-empowerment and a democratised site, whereas on the other hand, YouTube is a commercial company that first and foremost needs to make money. This co-existence has been noted since Google Inc. bought YouTube in 2006, and since then, the commercial foundation has been an overt part of what constitutes YouTube. Both aspects are moreover reflected in the conflicting relationships among YouTube's specific affordances, i.e., accessibility, increased user control, user-involvement etc., which all articulate the idea of user-empowerment. But simultaneously, the site's hierarchical organisation of content influences the overall interface and turns YouTube into a media platform based on competitive principles and power-law distribution. This relationship is furthermore, somewhat paradoxically, blurred by the general acceptance of the commercial and economic division of UGC creators, who exist in different social classes. Here YouTube Partners exceed the Pro-am culture, while non-partners are increasingly being marginalised. The YouTube Partners in many cases (in this sample) can be recognised as professional producers of UGC, who are authenticating themselves through identification with and adoption of the original ideology of amateurism and DIY culture on YouTube that they themselves started and now have turned into a profession.

However, since audiences seem to fully accept and enjoy the both commercialised and authentic self-presentation found in the UGC, does this co-existence of conflicting ideologies fundamentally matter? At the moment of this writing, probably not, but the original idea of a DIY community and amateurs who participate and share fundamental ideas of belongingness to something unique in terms of non-beneficial economic independence is being challenged by the gap between the UGC of YouTube Partners and non-partners. At the same time, the articulation of the viewer as an embedded agent within the video has been identified as one of the fundamental characteristics of UGC, but the commodification of the UGC culture implicitly transforms these social mechanisms into mechanisms of strategic marketing, where a "thumbs up" or the act of writing a comment no longer just illustrates dialogical user-involvement, but the user-involvement has just as much become a symbol for income, as monitored data that increase traffic. User-involvement thus also ultimately functions as a strategic tool to increase visibility. So far, the mode of transparency has authenticated and legitimated through the social use of user-involvement, but the balance seems to be challenged by the fact that many Vloggers turn towards more and more professional modes of producing audiovisual content that resembles contemporary television culture's accounting based on views and ratings. Consequently, the maintenance of an impression of authenticity is at risk of losing its validity since the authentication of creators through their belongingness to a YouTube community cannot be maintained, posing the possibility of a potential YouTube-bubble beneath the underlying idea of YouTube as a community.

This study, within the same discussion, has presented a somewhat critical view of the concept of user-empowerment and participation as the fundament of YouTube, although I agree that these elements are deeply integrated aspects of how we understand and refer to YouTube, as well as how creators authenticate themselves by acknowledging both the democratic potential and access to user-involvement. However, this does not characterise the majority of users on YouTube, who do not actively participate, thus echoing David Buckingham's statement that "*activity* should not be confused

by *agency*" (2009, p. 43). YouTube offers a range of affordances that enables these elements, but in practice they are just as much functioning as a mode of authenticating creators through the idea of the YouTube community, rather than being proof of the homogenous group of active viewers.

One important theoretical influence here is Joshua Meyrowitz' combination of medium theory and sociology, as presented in his volume *No sense of Space*. Although written in 1985 and in regards to electronic media, it has proven useful in understanding social behaviour on YouTube. Much of the UGC has embedded the use of self-reflexivity that establishes a Middle Region space, which also serves to communicate transparency and thus implicitly authenticate the creator by explicitly drawing the audience's attention towards the online identities' mediated context. For the same reason, it has also been argued that the representation of reality is also an important aspect of a great deal of the audiovisual self-presentations that do not just construct and cite already constructed realities, as touched upon in regards to the constructivist approach of cultural studies. Instead, I have advocated for an understanding of identity as an on-going process that takes place and is being shaped in correspondence with the creators, the content and the audience in a dynamic and interchanging process, where, e.g., creators construct their identities in a dialogical reflection with viewers' comments as well as previous videos. It has also proven useful from this position to apply aspects from "symbolic interactionism" in order to understand the self and how meaning is created in mediated social interactions between creator and audience. This furthermore has been extended through the adoption of the concept of performance from the field of performance studies.

Many other aspects could also have been involved in the analyses, including an elaboration of more concrete aspects of identity such as gender, sexuality and further investigations of youth cultures (although this aspect has implicitly been touched upon in the analyses, since most of the cases of first-person presentations involve youth culture). But as the intention was to understand the idea and concept of identity on YouTube within this specific type of content, these aspects were only touched peripherally.

This has also affected my choice of analytical focus, as I have chosen not to include an analysis of reception built on any methodology of, e.g., interviews or surveys; I have only included what was already available. Surely the inclusion of, e.g., interviews with creators would provide this dissertation with an extra dimension in terms of what identity is, but on the other hand, the richness and analytical potential in the enormous amount of content, which YouTube is really about, would have needed to be downgraded or even left out.

What this dissertation provides is an insight into how the self is presented and how we can understand YouTube as a facilitator of online identities. Finally, it also contributes with concrete knowledge about YouTube as a media platform and how ordinary people have adapted audiovisual modes of communication to perform the self in a mediated public culture, thus also suggesting how the modern self can be understood as an active and visible self that is constantly performing under the influence of media and its audience.

.....

References:

Accenture (2011). *Consumers of all ages are going over-the-top*. The Accenture Report. Retrieved August 2011: http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture_Communications_Media_Entertainment_Video-Over-Internet_Consumer_Usage_Survey.pdf

Anderson, C. (2006). *The Long Tail*. New York: Hyperion

Askehave, I. & A. Nielsen (2004). *Webmediated Genres: a challenge to traditional genre theory*. Aarhus: Center for Virksomhedskommunikation. Handelshøjskolen i Århus.

Aumont, J. (1997). *The Image*. London: British Film Institute.

Auslander, P. (1999). *Liveness*: *Performance in a mediatised culture*. London: Routledge.

Austin, J.L. (1975). *How to do Things with Words - 2nd Ed*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Bellour, R (2000). *The Analysis of Film / Raymond Bellour ; edited by Constance Penley*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.

Berelson, B. (1952). *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. Glencoe, IL.: The Free Press.

Bergman, J. R (1993). *Discreet Indiscretions – the social organization of gossip*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Berger, A.A (2000). *Media and Communication Research Methods: an Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Blumer, H. (1986) *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Bolter, J. D., & Grusin, R. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Bondebjerg, I. (2002). The Mediation of Everyday Life: Genre, Discourse and Spectacle in Reality TV. In A. Jerslev (ed.) *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media* (pp. 159-192). Copenhagen: Northern Lights, Museum Tusculanum Press.

Bondebjerg, I. (2008). *Virkelighedens fortællinger: den danske tv-dokumentarismes historie*. Frederiksberg : Samfundslitteratur.

Boyd, D. (2008a). Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. In D. Buckingham (ed.) *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning (pp. 119-142). Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Branigan, E. (1992). *Narrative Comprehension and Film*. London: Routledge

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Bruzzi, S. (2001). *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction,* London: Routledge.

Buckingham**,** D. (2009). A commonplace art? Understanding Amateur Media Production. In D. Buckingham & R. Willet (ed.). *Video Cultures* (pp.23-50). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Buckingham**,** D. (2011). *Home Truths? Video Production and Domestic Life*. Ann Arbor, Mich. : The University of Michigan Press.

Burnett, R., M. Consalvo, and C. Ess (2011) Introduction. In M. Consalvo, and C. Ess (Eds.) *The Handbook of Internet Studies* (pp. 1-8). Chicester : Wiley-Blackwell

Butler, J. (1990/2006). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that Matter – On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London: Routledge.

Burgess, J. (2007). Vernacular Creativity and New Media. PhD. Thesis. Queensland University of Technology.
Burgess, J. & J. Green (2009). *YouTube, Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Carlson, M. (1996). *Performance: A critical introduction*, Routledge, London.
Carroll, N. (2003). *Engaging the Moving Image.* New Haven: Yale University Press.
Cha, M., H. Kwak, P.Rodriguez, Y.Ahn, & S.Moon (2007). I Tube, You Tube, everybody tubes. Paper presented at IMC 07, October 24-26, 2007. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from: www.portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1298309
Chalfen, R. (1987). *Snapshot Versions of Life*. Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
Corner, J. (2002). Documentary Values. In A. Jerslev (ed.): *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media* (pp. 139-158). Copenhagen: Northern Lights, Museum Tusculanum Press.
Cooley, C.H. (1964/1902). *Human Nature and the Social order*. New York: Schocken

Deibert, R. (1997). *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Derrida, J. (1988). *Limited INC*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
Donath, J. and D. Boyd (2004). Public displays of connection. *BT Technology Journal,* 22 *(4)*, 71-82.
Dovey, J. (2000). *Freakshow, First Person Media and Factual Television*. London: Pluto Press.
Dovey, J. (2004) Camcorder Cults. In. R. Allen and A. Hill (Eds.)*The television studies reader* (pp. 557-568). London: Routledge

Eco, U. (1995). Cogito Interruptus. In. U. Eco (ed.) *Faith in Fakes* (pp. 221-238). London: Minerva
Eichhorn, K. (2001). Sites Unseen: Ethnographic Research in a Textual Community. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *14*, 565-578.
Eisenstein, E. (2005/1979) *The Printing Revolution Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Eliason, E. & J. Lundberg (2006). The appropriateness of Swedish municipality web site designs. Paper presented at the NordiCHI '06 Proceedings of the 4th Nordic conference on Human-computer interaction. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download%3Fdoi%3D10.1.1.101.7972%26rep%3Drep1%26type%3Dpdf
e-Marketer (2010) *What Do TV-Social Media Multitaskers Talk About?* Retrieved August 2011: http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1008301

Finnemann, N. O. (2005a). *Internettet i mediehistorisk perspektiv*. Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.
Finnemann, N. O. (2005b). The cultural grammar of the internet. In K.B. Jensen (ed.) *Interface://Culture – The World of Wide Web as Political Resource and Aesthetic Form* (pp. 65-89). Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.
Fiske, J. (1987) *Television Culture*. London: Routledge.
Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House.
Freedman, D., R. Pisani, R. Purves & A. Adhikari (1991). *Statistics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Galloway, A. (2004). *Protocol: how control exists after decentralization*. Cambridge, mass.: The MIT press
Gauntlett, D. (2011). *Making is Connecting*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Genette, G. (1997a). *Palimpsests: Literature in The Second Degree*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
Genette, G (1997b). *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gibson, J. (1986). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. New York: Psychology Press.
Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity
Gilmore, J.& J. Pine (2007). *Authenticity: What consumers really want*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
Goffman, E. (1959/1990). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Penguin Books
Goffman, E. (1967). On Face-Work. In E. Goffman (ed.) *Interaction Ritual: essays on face-to-face behaviour* (pp.5-46). Harmondsworth: Penguin
Grint, K. and Woolgar, G. (1997). *The machine at work: technology, work and organization*. Cambridge: Polity
Gripsrud, J. (2010) Preface. In J. Gripsrud (ed.) *Relocating Television: Television in the Digital Context, (*pp. XII-XV). London: Routledge
Grusin, R. (2009). YouTube at the End of New Media**.** In P. Snickars & P. Vonderau (Eds.) *The YouTube Reader* (pp.60-67). Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

Hagen, I. (2000). *Medias publikum: Frå mottakar til brukar?* Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
Hall, S. (1992/1973). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (Eds.) *Culture, media, language: working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79* (pp. 107-117). London: Routledge
Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: who needs identity? In S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds.) *Questions of cultural identity*. London Sage.
Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (ed.) *Representation – Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (pp. 13-75). London: Sage Publications.
Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.
Herring, S. (2004. Content Analysis for New Media: Rethinking the Paradigm. New Research for New Media: Innovative Research Methodologies Symposium Working Papers and Readings, 47-66.
Herring S.C (2008). Questioning the Generational Divide: Technological Exoticism and Adult Constructions of Online Youth Identity. In D. Buckingham (ed.) *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning (pp.71–92). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications.
Hirst, M. (2011). *News 2.0: Can journalism survive the Internet?* Australia: Allen & Unwin.
Hindman, M. (2009). *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
Hirdman, A. (2010). Vision and Intimacy- Gendered Communication Online. *Nordicom Review* 31 (*1*), 3-13
Hjarvad**,** S. (2002). Simulated conversations – The Simulation of Interpersonal Communication in Electronic Media. In A. Jerslev (ed.): *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media* (pp. 227-252). Copenhagen: Northern Lights, Museum Tusculanum Press.
Hjarvard, S. (2008). En verden af medier. Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.
Honneth, Axel (2001). *Invisibility: On the Epistemology of 'Recognition*'. *The Aristotelian Society*, Vol: *LXXV*, 111-126.

Horton, D. and R. Wohl (2006/1956). Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance. Reprinted in *Participations – Journal Audience and Reception Studies* 3 (*1*). Retrieved December 2011: http://www.participations.org/volume%203/issue%201/3_01_hortonwohl.htm
Hudson, A. (2011). Is Google taking the 'you' out of YouTube? *BBC Click*. Retrieved September 2011: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/click_online/9485376.stm
Hutchby, I. (2001). *Conversation and Technology: from the Telephone to the Internet*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Huffaker, D.A. and Calvert, S.L (2005). Gender, Identity, and Language Use in Teenage Blogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication,* 10 *(2)*. Retrieved September 2011: http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue2/huffaker.html

Innis, H. (1951). *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Innis, H. (2007/1954). *Empire and Communications*. Lanham, md: Rowman & littlefield publishers.

Jakobson, R. (1960). Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics. In T.A. Sebeok (ed.) *Style In Language* (pp. 350–377). Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press.
Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.
Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture*. New York: N.Y. University Press.
Jerslev, A. (2002). Introduction. In A. Jerslev (ed.) *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media* (pp.7-14). Copenhagen: Northern Lights, Museum Tusculanum Press.
Jerslev, A. & R. Gade (2005a). Introduction. In A. Jerslev & R. Gade (eds.) *Performative Realism* (pp. 7-18). Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press University of Copenhagen.
Jerslev, A. (2005b). Performativity and Documentary. In A. Jerslev & R. Gade (eds.) *Performative Realism* (pp. 85-116). Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press University of Copenhagen.
Jensen, K. B. (2010). *Media Convergence: The Three Degrees of Network, Mass and Interpersonal Communication*. London: Routledge.
Jones, S. (2010). The New Media, the New Meanwhile, and the Same Old Stories. In J. Hunsinger and L. Klastrup & M. Allen (eds.) *International Handbook of Internet Research* (pp. xv-xx). New York: Springer.

Keen, A. (2007). *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture and Assaulting Our Economy*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
Kilborn, R. (2003). *Staging the Real - Factual TV programming in the age of Big Brother*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Kingdom, M. (2006). Authenticity, Transparency, and Stealth Advertising. *Clickz*, retrieved January 2012, from: http://www.clickz.com/clickz/column/1708772/authenticity-transparency-stealth-advertising
Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content Analysis: an introduction to its methodology*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.
Kruitbosch, G. and F. Nack (2008). Broadcast yourself on YouTube – Really? Proceeding HCC '08 Proceedings of the 3rd ACM international workshop on Human-centred computing. Retrieved October 5, 2011: http://staff.science.uva.nl/~nack/papers/hcc02s-kruitbosch.pdf

Lambeth, J. (2010). *Digital Storytelling – Cookbook*. Berkeley, CA: Digital Dinner Press.
Landry, B. & M. Guzdial (2008). Art or Circus? Characterizing User-created Video on YouTube. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from: www.smartech.gatech.edu/bitstream/1853/25828/1/GT-IC-08-07.pdf
Lange, P. (2007). Publicly private and privately public: Social networking on YouTube. *In Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13*(1)*,1-18. Retrieved May 2011:http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/lange.html.
Lange, P. (2009). *Videos of Affinity on YouTube*. In P. Snickars & P. Vonderau (Eds.) *The YouTube Reader* (pp. 70-88). Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.
Leadbeater, C. and P. Miller (2004). *The Pro-am Revolution*. London: Demos
Lessing, L. (2004). *Free Culture: How big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. New York: The Penguin Press.
Levinson, P. (1999). *Digital McLuhan: a guide to the information millennium*. London: Routledge
Lindholm, C. (2008). *Culture and Authenticity*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
Lister, M., Dovey J., Giddings, S., Grant, I. & Kelly, K. (2009). *New Media: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge.
Logan R. (2004). *The Sixth Language: Learning a Living in the Internet Age*. Caldwell NJ: Blackburn Press.
Lovink, G. (2008). The Art of Watching Databases. Introduction to the Video Vortex Reader. In. G. Lovink & S. Niederer (Eds.) *The Video Vortex Reader. Responses to YouTube* (pp. 9–12). Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures,
Lowensohn, J. (2010). YouTube bumps video limit to 15 minutes. Retrieved 5 October 2011: http://news.cnet.com/8301-27076_3-20012090-248.html
Luers, W. (2007). Cinema without show business: A poetics of Vlogging. Retrieved June 16 2011, from http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.pid9999.0005.105.
Lundby, K. (2008) (ed.). *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories: self-representations in new media*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

McDonald, P. (2009). Digital Discords in the Online Media Economy: Advertising versus Content versus Copyright. In P. Snickars & P.Vonderau (eds.) *The YouTube Reader* (pp. 387-405). Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.
McKenzie, J. (2001). *Perform or Else*. London: Routledge.
McLuhan, M. (1995/1962). *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the making of typographic man*. Toronto: Toronto University Press
McLuhan, M. (1995/1964). *Understanding Media: the extensions of man*. London: Routledge.
McQuail, D. (2010). *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. Los Angeles, Calif. : Sage
Macnamara, J. (2006). Media Content Analysis: Uses Benefits & Best Practice Methodology. *Archipelago Press*. Research Paper. Retrieved October 2011: http://www.archipelagopress.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=33&Itemid=183
Manovich, L. (2001) *The Language of New Media*. Boston: MIT Press
Markham, A. N., & Baym, N. K. (eds.). (2009). *Internet inquiry: conversations about methods*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage Publications, Inc.
Marshall, G. (1998) Symbolic Interactionism. In *A Dictionary of Sociology*. Retrieved November 2011: http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Symbolic_Interactionism.aspx#2-_1O88:symbolicinteractionism-full
Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society – From the standpoint of a social behaviourist*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Metz, C. (1974). *Language and Cinema*. The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter
Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No Sense of Place* London: Oxford University Press.

Meyrowitz, J. (1994). Medium Theory. In D. Crowley and D. Mitchell (Eds.) *Communication theory today* (pp. 50-77). Polity Press. UK.
Meyrowitz, J. (2005) The Rise of Glocality. New Senses of Place and Identity in the Global Village. In K. Nyiri (Ed.) *A sense of place: The global and the local in mobile Communication* (pp. 21-30).Vienna: Passagen.
Miles, A. (2003). Softvideography. *Cybertext yearbook 2002-2003*. Retrieved June 2011: http://cybertext.hum.jyu.fi/index.php?browsebook=2
Miller, C. & Shepherd, D. (2009). Questions for genre theory form the blogosphere. In J. Giltrow & D. Stein (Eds.) *Genres in the Internet* (pp. 263-290). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
Mitchell, W.J.T (1990). Representation. In F. Lentricchin and T. McLaughhlin (eds.) *Critical Terms for Literary Study,* pp.11-22, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Molyneaux, H., S. O'Donnell, K. Gibson & J. Singer (2008). Exploring the gender Divide on YouTube. *The American Communication Journal*, 10 *(2),* 1-14.
Moore, A. (2002). Authenticity as authentication. *Popular Music,* 21 *(2)*, 209–223.
Moran, J. (2002). *There's No Place Like Home Video*. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.
Morley, D. (1980). *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding*. London: British Film Institute

Nielsen (2010). *The Three Screen Report*. Retrieved September 2011: http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports-downloads/2010/three-screen-report-q1-2010.html
Neuman, L. (1997). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
Nichols, B. (1991). *Representing Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Nichols, B. (1994). *Blurred boundaries: questions of meaning in contemporary.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Nichols, B. (2001). *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Norman, D. (2002). *The Design of Everyday Things*. London: MIT Press

O'Reilly, T. (2006). Web 2.0 Compact Definition: Trying again. Retrieved October 2011: http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2006/12/web-20-compact-definitiontryi.html.
Orgad, S. (2009). How Can Researchers Make Sense of the Issues Involved in Collecting and Interpreting Online and Offline Data? In N. K. Baym & A. N. Markham (eds.) *Internet inquiry: conversations about methods* (pp. 33-53). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
Ong, W. J (1982). *Orality and Literacy – The Technologizing of the Word*. London & New York: Methuen.

Papacharissi, Z. (2009). The virtual geographies of social networks: a comparative analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn and ASmallWorld. *New Media Society* 11 *(1),* 199-220.
Postman, N. (1970). The reformed English curriculum. In A. C. Eurich (Ed.) *High school 1980: The shape of the future in American secondary education* (pp. 160-168). New York: Pitman.
Postman, N. (1986). *Amusing Ourselves to Death: public discourse in the age of show business.* London: Heinemann.
Plantinga, C.R. (1997). *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rasmussen, T.A., L. H. Christensen and P. Kofoed (2009). User-Generated Video and Intertextuality. Paper presented at Keywords in Communication 2009 Conference of the ICA.
Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative (vol 3)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Scannell, P. (1996). *Radio, Television & Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Scannell, P. (2007). *Media and communication*. London : Sage publications ltd
Schechner, R. (2006). *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge
Shepherd, M. & C. Watters (1999). The Functionality Attribute of Cybergenres**.** Paper presented at Proceedings of the 32nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.
Simmel, G. (1950). Sociability. In I.K. Wolf (Ed.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (pp.40-57). New York: The Free Press.
Snickars, P. & P. Vonderau. Introduction. In P. Snickars & P. Vonderau (Eds.) *The YouTube Reader* (pp.9-21). Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.
Stamps, J. (1995). *Unthinking modernity: Innis, McLuhan, and the Frankfurt School*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press
Strangelove, *M. (2010*). *Watching YouTube - extraordinary videos by ordinary people.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Stern, S. (2008). Producing Sites, Exploring Identities: Youth Online Authorship. In D. Buckingham (ed.) *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Series on Digital Media and Learning (pp.95-118). Cambridge, MA: The MIT-Press.
Sørensen, C.F. and L.L. Bølling (2011). Socialt tv – de digitale medier stormer frem, men hvad med tv? Retrieved September 2011: http://www.omdintouch.dk/2011/07/socialt-tv-de-digitale-medier-stormer-frem-men-hvad-med-tv/

Tapscott, D (2009). *Grown up Digital*. New York: McGraw Hill.
Taylor, C. (1991). *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Toffler, A. (1981). *The Third Wave*. London: Pan Books in association with Collins
Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The Media and Modernity, A social theory of the media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Thompson, J. B (2005). The New Visibility. *Theory, Culture & Society* 22 (*6): 31-51*.
TNS Gallup TV-Meter (2010). Retrieved September 2011: http://tvm.gallup.dk/tvm/pm/default.htm
Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the Screen. Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
Trilling, L. (1973). *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Turner, Graeme (2010). *Ordinary People and the Media: The Demotic Turn*. London: Sage

van Dijck, J. (2005). Capturing the family: home video in the age of digital reproduction. In P. Pisters and W. Straat (Eds.) *Shooting the Family: Transnational Media and Intercultural Values* (pp. 25-40). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
van Dijck, J. (2009). Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media Culture Society*, 31 *(1),* 41-58.

Wall, T. (2005). Folksonomy Definition and Wikipedia. Retrieved October 11, 2011 from http://www.vanderwal.net/random/entrysel.php?blog=1750

Warmbrodt, J., H. Sheng, and R. Hall (2008). Social Network Analysis of Video Bloggers. Paper presented at the 41st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.
Wayne, T. (2007). Now, the Sequel to Lonelygirl15. *Time*. Retrieved January 2012: http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1534313,00.html
Website-monitoring.com on YouTube statistics May 2010: http://www.website-monitoring.com/blog/2010/05/17/youtube-facts-and-figures-history-statistics
Wellman, B. (2011). Studying the Internet through the Ages. In M. Consalvo, and C. Ess (eds.) *The Handbook of Internet Studies* (pp. 17-23). Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell
White, M (2003). Too Close to See: Men, Women and Webcams. *New Media Society* 5 *(1),* 7-28.
Williams, R. (1997/1974). *Television: Technology and Cultural form*. London: Routledge.
Williams, R. (2008/1958). Culture is Ordinary. In N. Badmington and J. Thomas (Eds.) *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* (pp. 82-94). London: Routledge

Zimmerman, P. (1995). *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Appendix ("Bilag")

Because of the large amount of data, I have added documentation for my empirical sample in electronic format i.e. of an attached Data-CD. The CD contains 5 parts:

Appendix 1
This first appendix contains frame grabs of the 900 videos divided into browsing categories and temporal distinctions as described in the methodology chapter (cf. *3.1* and illustrated in *Figure 6*) including the groups 1-9. These groups were identified through frame grabs from the YouTube website. Each file is dated and shows the exact time of registration. Each file consists of the front picture of the video, its title, running time and browsing category/temporal group.

Appendix 1 includes the file:

- *Ap. 1.1) FRAME GRABS Group 1-9*

Appendix 2:
This file includes three files from the three individual codings of the 900 videos as each video was designed in *FileMaker Pro*. The three files are named:

- *Ap. 2.1) Coding # 1 TMS*
- *Ap. 2.2) Coding # 2*
- *Ap. 2.3) Coding # 3*

I have only used the data of Coding #2 and Coding #3 in the *Intercoder-reliability* test (cf. chapter 4). On the basis of this test I have used my own coding, *AP. 2.1 Coding #1 TMS* as the reference to the registrations of occurrences of content in primarily chapter 3.

Appendix 3:
It includes two files with my codings that provide the reader with an overview of the registration of additional keywords including YouTube Partner status (cf. *3.9*). The other file documents the registration of specific Vlogs types (cf. *9.3*). The files of additional keywords is entitled:

- *Ap.3.1) UGC (YT Partner status)*

And the file containing registrations of Vlog types is called:

- *Ap. 3.2) Vlogs - coding*

Both files are identical with the files in "Appendix 2" from the coding-scheme in *FileMaker Pro*, but have been extended with the additional registrations.

Appendix 4:
These files provide are an overview of the statistic data used to conduct the *Intercoder-reliability* test. They involve the specific statistics, calculations for identifying the *CHI-Square*, as demonstrated individually for "Overall Type", "UGC-Genres" and "Fiction/Non-fiction". The exact statistics of "Form of Communication" and "Keywords" are illustrated in the "Table 2" and "Table 3" in *4.1* and *4.2*. They are therefore not included in the appendix. They can, however, also be found in *Ap. 4.1) Overview of Reliability test,* which contains an overview of all coding categories.

Appendix 4 includes the following files:

- *Ap. 4.1) Overview of Reliability test*
- *Ap. 4.2) CHI-square test TYPE*
- *Ap. 4.3) CHI-Square test UGC-Genres*
- *Ap. 4.4)CHI-square test Fiction/Non-Fiction*

Appendix 5:
The last appendix includes an overview of the 900 videos registered in the first phase of this study. It documents the titles of 900 videos collected from identical browsing categories as attached in "Appendix 1". But they only exist as an Excel-file and have only been registered in terms of title and browsing group.
The file is named:

- *Ap. 5.1) 2009 Sample*

PART II – THE ARTICLES

Categorising YouTube

ABSTRACT

This article provides a genre analytical approach to creating a typology of the User Generated Content (UGC) of YouTube. The article investigates the construction of navigation processes on the YouTube website. It suggests a pragmatic genre approach that is expanded through a focus on YouTube's technological affordances. Through an analysis of the different pragmatic contexts of YouTube, it is argued that a taxonomic understanding of YouTube must be analysed in regards to the vacillation of a user-driven bottom-up *folksonomy* and a hierarchical browsing system that emphasises a culture of competition and which favours the already popular content of YouTube.

With this taxonomic approach, the UGC videos are registered and analysed in terms of empirically based observations. The article identifies various UGC categories and their principal characteristics. Furthermore, general tendencies of the UGC within the interacting relationship of new and old genres are discussed. It is argued that the utility of a conventional categorical system is primarily of analytical and theoretical interest rather than as a practical instrument.

Introduction

One significant reason for the popularity of YouTube and the emergence of User Generated Content (UGC) is the site's accessibility (Lister et al., 2009, p. 227). Within seconds, anyone can gain access to its content and in less than 10 minutes learn how to upload audiovisual material to the site. Another explanation is the personalised viewing experience and the VOD-structure that contrast traditional television distribution (Cha et al., 2007). But the unlimited accessibility also turns YouTube into a boundless and heterogeneous medium platform. Here, anyone can be a creator and publisher without limitations. In a speech on new media, Habermas characterises this development as a lack of control. He warns against the "decentralisation of access to unedited contributions" on the Internet:

> Der begrüßenswerte Zuwachs an Egalitarismus, den uns das Internet beschert, wird mit der Dezentrierung der Zugänge zu unredigierten Beiträgen bezahlt. In diesem Medium verlieren die Beiträge von Intellektuellen die Kraft, einen Fokus zu bilden (2006, p. 4).

According to Habermas, the Internet medium is characterised by a loss of focus because there is no overall intellectual and cultural control (i.e., the lack of expert systems and dominant institutions), which then results in superficiality. This aversion to new media platforms seems exaggerated, although it raises the fundamental issue of how to make sense of and navigate the Internet. This is also stated by Giltrow and Stein, who make a similar argument: "Internet genres appear not to have the same obligatoriness and ritualized expectedness as non-Internet genres: this is meant by saying they are less 'focussed'" (2009, p. 11).

The lack of obligatoriness towards generic conventions on YouTube becomes evident if we take a quick glance at its varied content. Although YouTube provides categories for its users, it is also a melting pot of content where traditional genre conventions in many ways are inadequate**.** Fiction and non-fiction, television content, home-movies of pets and creative animations are placed in the same categories. This makes it difficult to make sense of YouTube and its content.

In this article, I argue that the boundless organisation of YouTube content is related to how users navigate on YouTube. Navigation on YouTube can be accomplished by the process of locating texts throughout the facilities of a digital database of audiovisual content (cf. Lovink, 2008; Kessler & Schäfer, 2009). This entails that navigation is also related to the technological infrastructure of YouTube, i.e., browsing mechanisms and metadata that organise and define the videos. When we examine YouTube, a pertinent issue is, therefore, how we distinguish and identify the different types of content and in which ways do the navigational structure and properties of YouTube have an impact upon these. And does the navigational structure of YouTube supersede the need for organising content through traditional taxonomic approaches? Moreover, these issues are relevant with regards to the methodological process of collecting data on YouTube, which to a large extent is defined throughout the processes of navigation.

This article addresses these issues through an investigation of the concept of genre in relation to YouTube and more specifically UGC. It argues that a pragmatic approach proves especially useful for providing an understanding of the typology of YouTube, since it also involves a contextual focus on the navigational processes. The analysis draws on an empirical sample of videos, and it examines the processes of navigation.

Understanding genre

Since Plato and Aristotle, genre has been widely accepted as a principal practice of communication. There is common agreement on the understanding of genre as a tool of making sense in everyday situations as well as in discourses. Disagreement, however, becomes evident in the numerous discussions of different criteria (e.g., semantic or syntactic) as well as in the matter of genre stability and changeability. It has also been argued that a focus on genre instead of concrete texts could lead to reductionism (e.g., Bauman & Briggs, 1992; or Stam, 2000). One approach for avoiding reductionism is to consider genres from a pragmatic perspective (e.g., Swales, 1990). Miller also proposes a pragmatic approach based in rhetorical action, in the sense that "it acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose"(1984, p. 163). Her approach foregrounds genre as a dynamic and elastic concept that is fundamentally not interested in aesthetics, but rather involves "conventions of discourses" (ibid.) based on contextual meaning. It is influenced by, for instance, institutional organisation and agency as well as media specific contexts. Miller regards genre as a fusion of form, content and situation and emphasises the last. This involves a focus on the relationship between motivation and situation. She focuses primarily on the *social action* that genre generates within agency. Through an analytical focus on YouTube, I will nonetheless maintain an emphasis on the significance of content as an important part of the pragmatic approach, which also includes the action related to the navigational processes of making sense of YouTube's content since users's reception of UGC must be regarded in close relationship with the world of the text and vice versa.

Interface and affordances of YouTube

The pragmatic approach, as developed by Miller, moreover pays little attention to the relationship between genre and the medium (also see Askehave & Nielsen, 2004). YouTube is not an independent medium, but a medium platform that functions as a database in the form of a facilitator for audiovisual content in which the social action can be regarded not only as utterances, but also through the use of the technological interface. The suggestion that the properties of the medium have an impact on, for example, the development of genres draws on the *medium theory* approach famously developed by McLuhan in the 1960s.

Drawing on the pragmatic approach, Shepherd and Watters (1999) emphasise, in their investigation of websites, the functionality of the medium, where "functionality refers to capabilities available in the new medium" (p. 1), i.e., how to interact with genre. This is useful in a genre analysis of websites as exemplified by Eliason and Lundberg (2006). Their analysis examines genre and active interaction among users.

Functionality is, however, a more complex matter on YouTube. This is reflected in the agency of YouTube, which is not exclusively based on interaction, but also on consumption as regular streaming. I shall thus refer to the aspects of functionality on YouTube from a wider perspective, as the media properties or as the *affordances* of YouTube's interface. These include commenting, rating and responding, but also meta-communication such as tagging. If we regard the affordances of YouTube in relation to the most basic understanding of Gibson's term, then an affordance of YouTube is what the site "offers" or "provides" for its users (Gibson, 1986, p. 127). In that sense, the affordances of YouTube also include accessibility (streaming software and uploading mechanisms) as well as institutional and social organisation (Hjarvard, 2008). Hence, this stresses the importance of navigation in terms of making sense within content.

Available search categories on YouTube

YouTube provides its users with accessible categories of different content. The categories are defined by the YouTube administration and specified by the creators, when they upload a video. At first it might appear to be a feasible approach to let creators characterise their own videos on the basis of available categories, but the insufficiency of this procedure is obvious when the categories are examined.

The categories are generally too wide and thematically tied. This is evident in reference to the category *Pets & Animals*. This category is based on the appearance of animals in a specific video, which basically could involve all genres and all types of content. A quick glance into the category reveals that the *Pets & Animals* category includes music videos, home movie videos, commercials, cartoons and Vlogs, or video blogging, which all seem to have been blended into the same category on the basis of the appearance of animals. In this category, there are, moreover, several examples of content that have nothing to do with animals, such as football highlights, fashion shows and computer programming. YouTube does not provide any key words or categorical characteristics, which are instead subjectively selected by the creators. YouTube only provides labels derived from other media platforms like the television programme *Americas Funniest Home Videos.* This demonstrates that the "obligatoriness" and "ritualised expectedness" of these categories are characterised by greater fluidity than traditional audiovisual genres, and indicates that this lack of consistency and focus is a consequence of the absence of an explicit institution, transforming the navigating principles among the users of YouTube.

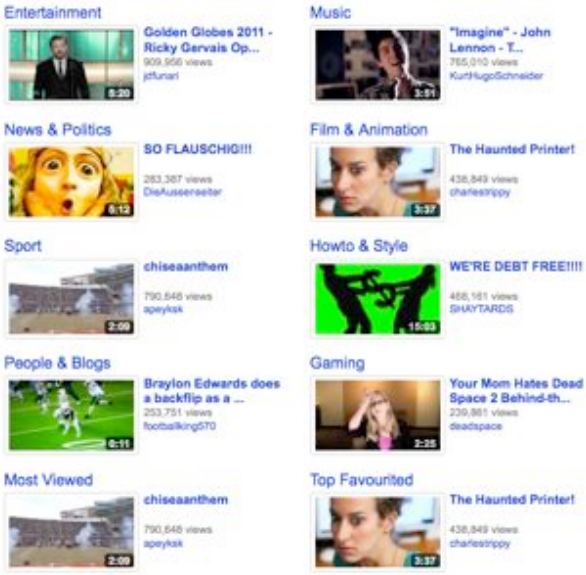


Figure 1: A frame grab of the most popular browsing categories on YouTube – 20.01.2011

Some of the categories refer to already existing genres, which on YouTube involve divergent connotations, since the video format and process of producing and consuming differ from other types of audiovisual broadcasting. This is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the most popular browsing categories that automatically appear on YouTube's main homepage. Some of the videos correspond with the proposed category. For instance, this is the case with the videos in the *Music, Entertainment* and the *Film & Animation* categories. But the videos in the *Sport, People and Blogs* and *Gaming* categories only partially correspond: for example, the video *chiseaanthem* is a musical performance, *Braylon Edwards does a backflip* is a sports highlight and the video *Your Mom hates Dead Space 2 Behind* is about gaming, but it is also a viral commercial. The two videos in the categories *News & Politics* (*So Flauschig!!!*) and *How to & Style* (*We're debt free!!!*) are of course categorised by the creators themselves, but they do not seem to correspond with the categories. Both videos are first person videos that emphasise direct user-interaction and they are more related to the so-called *Vlogs*. They should, in comparison to similar videos, be categorised within the *People & Blogs* or the *Entertainment* categories, where almost identical videos from the same creators can be found.

With this lack of consistency, it can also be argued that these categories are more differentiated than similar categories on other media platforms. The browsing categories moreover are limited to the most popular content, since each category only contains the 100 most popular videos. This is also the case with the other available categories, such as the most viewed, discussed and top-rated videos.

Content can also be found and browsed through using the "YouTube search engine". Its functionality helps to find material outside the popular sphere. That is, as long as users already know the title or the creator of the video. If users type in random key words, the navigation process follows the same principle as the other browsing tools on YouTube, where the site primarily presents popular content before less popular content.

Tagging

The tagging tool is another way of navigating on YouTube. Videos on YouTube can be attached with a tagging option, where uploaders can add meta-data to their videos in the form of tags that direct viewers towards the video when they search through YouTube. Tags can be regarded as video IDs and they could therefore be helpful when creating genres. This, however, depends on the senders' consistency in using meaningful tags that are not just subjective selections of words. This is often compromised, since many videos include tags that are added in order to promote the video. Creators compete for visibility and their pursuit of fame and self-promotion often undermine the typological importance. Even though some creators use relevant tags, the YouTube interface implicitly prevents many of these videos from being found. Based on previous video searches, YouTube automatically highlights the most popular videos with similar tags that users have watched earlier. These videos are grouped under the headline "Recommended for You". In that sense, users are driven towards the most popular videos. This search structure further gives video creators an incentive to attach more appealing tags and thereby more hits, despite adding information which in the very end is misleading. In that sense, YouTube is becoming a competitive platform striving for visibility (Westenberg, 2008; Wasko & Erickson, 2009).

Within the content of the videos, YouTube has also developed the *Annotation Tool*. It is an editorial tool that allows users to integrate signs and text layers, e.g., in the form of pop-up speech bubbles. Their main function is to link to other videos of the same producer and to encourage users to rate or subscribe. This rather chaotic co-existence of different content and the integration of annotations as well as links and comments characterise YouTube as a "Folksonomy*"* – a term coined by Vander Wal (also see Bruns, 2008). Wal describes meta-data like tags as "bottom-up social classification" (Wal, 2005), where users, despite the lack of focus, are able to communicate through specific and conventional codes and links generated by YouTube.

The dominance of popular content

Access to videos on YouTube is designed as a VOD-system, but when the YouTube administration through the main website organises and presents videos for the users, the already popular videos are maintained on the website in the front, along with the videos with the most views and highest ratings. Dijck also underlines this:

> YouTube users are steered towards a particular video by means of coded mechanisms which heavily rely on promotion and ranking tactics, such as the measuring of downloads and the promotion of popular favourites (2009, p. 45).

This principle is an example of *The Rich-Get-Richer* (Simons, 2008, p. 246) and what Cha at el. refer to as *Information Bottleneck* (2007, p. 3), where non-popular content or niche videos are less likely to be found, since the popular content is dominating the YouTube interface. Through the Information Bottleneck, YouTube becomes a homogenous and hierarchical top-down controlled medium platform. The site is indirectly controlling what content you will find when browsing the server.

The principle of highlighting particular content has resulted in a vacillation between a bottom-up structure, where producers create and upload less popular UGC, and a top-down structure, where the most popular UGC are consumed. Researchers have previously described the gap between UGC and non-UGC (Landry & Guzdial, 2008; Burgess & Green, 2009), but it can also be argued that the discrepancy exists within UGC. One explanation for this vacillation is that commercials, since the Google Inc. take over in November 2006, have been attached to the videos and companies can buy promotion in the most popular categories, thus providing certain UGC with an increasing commercial value (Wasko & Erickson, 2009). YouTube has moreover sponsored

YouTube Partners of UGC, who are paid for the amount of views, subscriptions and high ratings their videos receive[1].

Overall, the browsing categories, the tagging system, the promoted content categories and search-options are tied to YouTube's interface, and it has become impossible to navigate systematically without instantaneously reaching the most shared and popular content. Hence, this organisational structure indirectly designs the content on YouTube and in that sense the affordances exemplified in the interface and design of the website serve a co-creating role in constructing genres on YouTube.

An aspect that has not been touched upon is the exterior viewing of videos through linking from online newspapers and soft-news programmes on television, as well as Facebook and Twitter. Most videos are attached with statistical data and it is by this means possible to investigate a video's statistical data. It is beyond the scope of this article to track the statistical data of each video, but a random check of the different videos from the sample, which will be analysed below, reveals that most of the videos have not received any noticeable views from exterior links. A small number of videos, with primarily clips of music and film celebrities who are famous beyond the YouTube community, have a higher percentage of the views accounting for exterior links, while most of the videos that were randomly checked have much less of their views from exterior links. The role of exterior linking appears therefore to be of less importance than the affordances specifically related to YouTube's website.

A final notion on genre is intertextuality. Intertextuality is especially relevant in regards to changeability and the dynamism of genres.

The intertextual dimension

Since navigation through content is no longer performed by institutional labelling and framing, the demands for digital literacy and individual cultural knowledge are accordingly foregrounded on YouTube. If users want to make sense of the content, they are forced to navigate and communicate through the cultural knowledge they receive by interacting with other users, in which case intertextuality is a helpful tool of communication.

Deriving from Bakthin's notion on dialogism, Kristeva (1980, pp. 64-65) argues for an intertextual understanding of discourses that stresses dynamism and polyphony, but also involves the cultural context that is a further focal point in the pragmatic approach (also see Briggs & Bauman, 1992; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). As a *cultural practice* (Fiske, 1987) or as *horizons of expectation* (Todorov, 1990), genre also implies intertextuality in terms of recognition and as fundamental knowledge for navigating through established genres. Drawing on this, Palmer (1990) proposes that generic expectation can also be juxtaposed with Goffman's concept of *Frame Analysis* (1984). With Goffman's framing concept, we thus broaden the understanding of genre as a mode to perceive the social reality. This bridges a pragmatic understanding of genre (including the affordances of YouTube) to socio-cultural methods (in which intertextuality is embedded). Building on this, both Askehave and Nielsen (2004) and Miller and Shepherd (2009) suggest that intertextuality is embedded in the Internet through its properties, which overtly connect different texts with each other. Intertextuality in relation to YouTube is accentuated as a consequence of the navigation processes such as linking structure, tags and annotations. In that sense we can also regard intertextuality as an affordance of YouTube.

[1] The YouTube partner programme is described in detail here: http://www.youtube.com/t/partnerships_benefits.

With a pragmatic genre approach, it can be illustrated that the formation of genres, of course, depends on form and content, but also equally on the organisational structure of YouTube developed by Google (including the technological affordances) that very much determines how users and creators can consume and navigate through content. This furthermore has a bearing on how collecting empirical data from available browsing categories on YouTube consequently will be influenced by promoted strategies and why certain content most likely will appear in a sample of YouTube content.

Methodological approach

The methodological scope presented in this article draws on the empirical research of my dissertation. Nine hundred videos were collected in July 2010. They were selected from among available browsing categories on the YouTube website and represent a sample of the most popular content of YouTube. The videos were collected from three different categories reflecting different levels of user activity. This includes viewing, discussing and rating[2]. Each of the three main groups is divided into temporal groups. Since each category is juxtaposed in the browsing categories presented by YouTube, with no hierarchical division between them, the three groups can be considered as comparable groups of the most popular content of YouTube. In that sense, the browsing categories of YouTube present promoted content, but in contrast to television, where the criteria for visibility is primarily registered in viewing ratings, the criteria for visibility on YouTube is also founded in user-interaction throughout comments, subscriptions and video responding. I selected the following available categories from the YouTube website: a) "All time", b) "This Month" and c) "Today".

Through the temporal distinction, both old and new videos are included in the sample in order to broaden the data. And through this temporal distinction, videos with relatively few views or few comments are also included. This results in a sample that, at the time of collecting the data, included videos with 285,000,000 views in the most viewed of *All Time* category as well as videos with down to 300 views in the *Top-rated of Today* category.

After the removal of duplicates and non-identifiable content, there are a total of 738 videos. The focus is on the UGC, and I have therefore excluded other types of content. An initial step to distinguish UGC from other type of content is in terms of agency.

The videos on YouTube can be divided into two overall groups of producing agents who are referred to as the "Amateurs" and the "Professionals". On one level, the distinction between amateurs and professionals is straightforward. As Buckingham argues: "an amateur receives no financial payment of their participation in an activity, while a professional does" (2009, p. 32). This distinction is, however, as Buckingham also underlines, difficult to maintain – especially with the emergence of the YouTube Partner Programme. Leadbeater and Miller describe agency as an accelerating blurring concept using the term "Pro-Ams" (2004), which bridges professional and amateurs. On YouTube, this hybrid exists in between the polarity of amateur and professional video production. The culture of Pro-Ams has spread, and many producers of UGC are now producing videos for YouTube as their main profession (e.g., YouTube partners, sponsored promoters).

This blending of amateurs and professionals is also one of the principal characteristics of the participatory culture described most notably by Jenkins (2006). It involves a growing empowerment of the users, who have become far more operative users and are simultaneously increasingly visible. Bruns describes this as a transformation into *produsage*, where he regards users and producers as merged into a *produser* (2008). While Bruns' term fits perfectly with, for instance, *Wikipedia*, the users on YouTube are not both producers and users per se (Dijck, 2009).

[2] The "rating" category, since the collection of data in 2010, has been removed as an available browsing category by YouTube.

The level of participation and involvement depends on the function and type of consumption of videos. The understanding of agency must therefore be defined within this context in which users and creators are not solely *produsers*, but are just as much traditional producers and consumers. The process of creating UGC in that sense involves an adaptation of commercial business strategies that gradually will result in a gap between the ordinary "amateur" producers and "Pro-ams", who have adapted the mechanisms of social networking and amateur-style and turned it into cultural and economic profit.

It is therefore necessary to distinguish between ordinary users who are merely publishers and the YouTube celebrities who now dominate the popular sphere of YouTube. For the same reason, the act of distinguishing between UGC and traditional professional content becomes progressively more difficult. This act is, however, still possible through a focus on the particular form and content as well as distributional methods.

A useful distinction is between primary and secondary distribution of the YouTube content. Primary distribution contains content that is produced with the purpose of distributing it on YouTube and this includes all UGC. UGC includes self-presentational videos, video diaries, humoristic and political statements as well as emotional and parodic confession videos. Videos of the secondary distribution group include content that has primarily been produced for other media platforms such as television and cinema. A large group of film and music producers, politicians and television stations mainly use YouTube as both primary and secondary platforms. Videos made by these producers are represented in this article by two major categories: *Music Videos* and *Television Highlights*. Professional record companies that use YouTube as a promotional and regular streaming platform, usually upload the Music Videos and they can be identified through the sender. Through this distinction, UGC can be separated from other types of content.

It can be difficult to maintain a taxonomic distinction between the producers of UGC who use YouTube as primarily a distribution platform and the producers of Music Videos and *Television* Highlights. Therefore, the division on the basis of agency must also be accompanied by the identification of the content. The need to include content alongside agency is evident in regards to Television Highlights. The Television Highlights differ from Music Videos because they are uploaded by UGC creators, though not created by them and therefore not UGC. This content, for example, can be determined through television logos and professional studio setups. In these types of videos, the distinction is made through a combination of user agency and identification of the content.

Consequently, UGC is regarded as videos for which producers intend to create and distribute videos on YouTube, which have not already been distributed on any traditional platforms such as television or radio. Finally, a large group of UGC combines material from already existing content. These videos are made by mixing existing material with their own UGC and will be referred to as *Mashups*.

Based on the differentiation of agents and their distribution of content as illustrated in the pie chart below, this initial distinction results in a sample of 473 UGC videos.

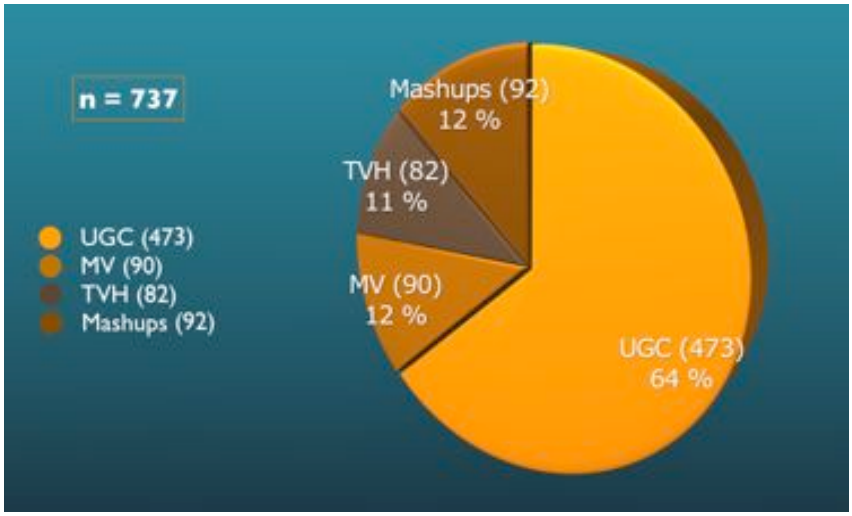


Figure 2

The distinctive appearances of content within each categorical group (where the three temporal groups are included) is illustrated below:

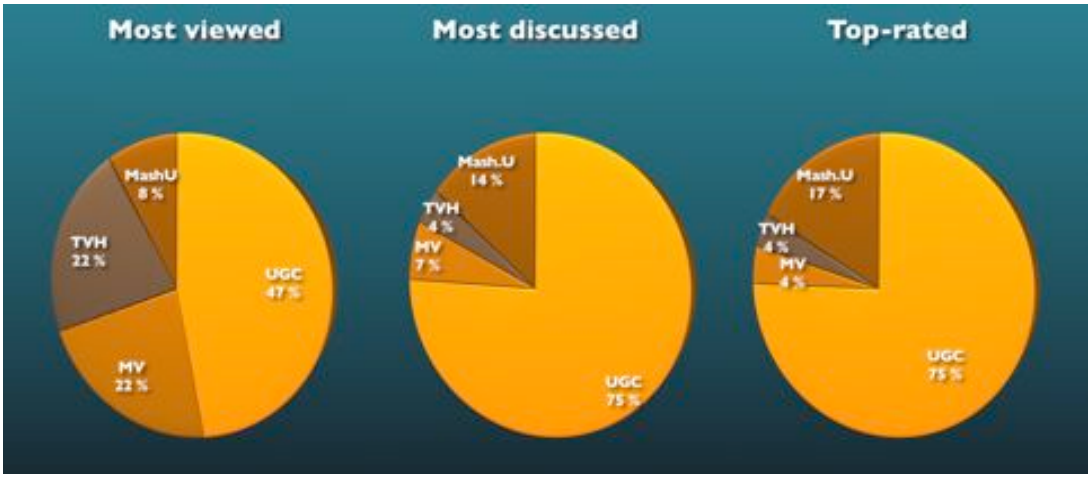


Figure 3

Figure 3 reveals that Television Highlights and Music Videos dominate the quantitatively largest group, while videos with a higher degree of interaction (in terms of discussions and ratings) are more dominated by UGC. Nevertheless, UGC still dominates the most viewed group, with 47% of the registered content, also supporting the findings of Burgess and Green (2009).

Forms of UGC

One task of defining new genres is the necessity to outline the characteristics of a particular genre. Tudor has referred to this as an *empiricist dilemma:*

> We must first isolate the body of films which are 'Westerns'. But they can only be isolated on the basis of the 'principal' characteristics, which can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated (1974, p. 135).

This dilemma also involves the YouTube categories that are suggested in this article. This article seeks to identify categories of YouTube, but in pursuance of doing so, their principle characteristics

must be described. And in order to describe these, we must first isolate the body of the videos. Within the coding process, the use of predefined categories was therefore necessary to differentiate the videos, and in that sense, this results in an empiricist dilemma. This entails that the categories described in this article derive from provisionally defined categories based on an initial observation of 900 videos in 2009. From this observation, the videos in the sample from 2010 were subsequently assigned additional characteristics, such as keywords and form of communication in the coding process. Young also touches upon this dilemma and states:

> We cannot exclude our own critical and theoretical acts of typification (…) each analysis is merely one expression of genre knowledge among many, one that subverts the very idea of 'pure' genre categories (2008, p. 232).

Therefore, we should not regard the definition of UGCs in this article as unique categories, but rather as proposed categories that by the above-mentioned process analytically can be navigated through. It is, nevertheless, possible to observe the occurrence of each genre and describe their principle characteristics. The predefined genres and their characteristics are shown in the figure below:

UGC Category	Predefined Characterisation
Vlogs	The Vlog is a form of video blogging that is presented through a first person camera and communicates directly to the viewer. It includes a wide spectre of autobiographical confessions and everyday depictions as well as product demonstrations. Another characteristic is the foregrounded focus on the creator and on the self-representative role.
Musical Performances	This category is dominated by self-presentational videos which are always presented within a musical performance. E.g. a cover number, a UGC music video or an audio number added a graphic layer. Therefore, they are not exclusively characterised by the visual presence of the creator. Compared to the Vlogs they often intend to communicate artistic skills of the video creator rather than autobiographical or personal issues.
How to & Instructional	Rather than to create a self-representation, the creator of the video presents a specific artefact or instructs the viewers in a given act. The form can be first person camera as well as a voice over with a visual illustration. Focus is on the object being presented and not on the presenter. Moreover, this category often involves a learning aspect and is less likely to involve autobiographical or artistic expressions.
YouTube Moments	The term derives from the "Kodak Moment", which signals a rare and one time occasion being captured. The YT Moments are recordings without an informative context and coincidental home video recordings of both dramatic and humoristic events. The creators of these videos can normally be identified i.e. through voice over. There is therefore no guarantee that the sender of these videos is also the creator.
Artistic & Lyrical	These videos have an emphasis on the aesthetic expression and foreground audiovisual form rather than content and rhetorical self-representation. In these videos there are also many graphic elements and animations are frequently integrated.
Political Statements	This category is identified through its thematic content tied to a political argument. The videos integrate rhetorical argumentation through signs and voice over. In this category, the creator is implicitly present in the videos, but can also be visible in front of the camera.
Short Narratives & Sketches	This category is identical with the fictional short narrative film. Most of the videos are staged sketches played by actors or by the creators playing a fictional role.
Parodies	Parodies are similar to the Short Narratives, but different in terms of their reference to other texts, which they imitate. This category also includes parodic comments in the form of video responses (involving the pastiche, the travesty and the caricature).
Interview & Reportage	This category has resemblance to the Vlogs, but is different since focus is not necessarily on the creator of the video, but just as much on surroundings (e.g. interviewees and events). This category is also identified by a reportage style (often handheld) instead of a first person camera. These videos primarily depict everyday situations or funny events rather than political issues.

Figure 4

The coding scheme was designed in *File Maker Pro*, where the proposed UGC categories were integrated along with temporal groups, the overall types of videos (UGC, Music Videos (MV), Television Highlights (TVH) or Mash Ups), the registration of sender, as well as the length of the video (in order to identify the videos). To identify the principle characteristics of the UGC genres, a number of key words were added. These include:

- **Thematic registrations -** e.g., *family*, *domestic* and *holiday* themes.
- **Form registrations -** e.g., *credits, first person. camera, voice over, transformed look/voice* and *background music.*
- **User-interaction registrations** – e.g., *meta-commenting*[3]*, intertextuality*[4]*, competitions* and *explicit user-interaction.*
- **Affordance-based registrations**[5] – e.g., *annotations, commercials* and *screen-tags*

Forms of communication

Finally, various forms of communication were also included. These forms are adapted from Nichols' distinction between forms of representation in regards to documentary (1991 & 2001). Nichols distinguishes between seven forms of communication: the *didactic*, the *observational*, the *interacting*, the *reflexive*, the *performative*, the *poetic* and the *fictional or dramatic* forms. I will not go into detail regarding each form of representation, but simply refer to them as different modes of addressing the users. Based on initial observations of UGC, a clear tendency towards the appearance of non-fiction content was noticed. For that reason, the coding scheme has an emphasis on forms of representation rather than fictional forms. This aspect also reflects a classic taxonomic distinction between discourses of fiction and non-fiction, which has also been integrated into the coding scheme, where the possibility of a mix of fiction and non-fiction has been added.

All of the above-mentioned elements were integrated into the coding scheme as illustrated in Figure 5.

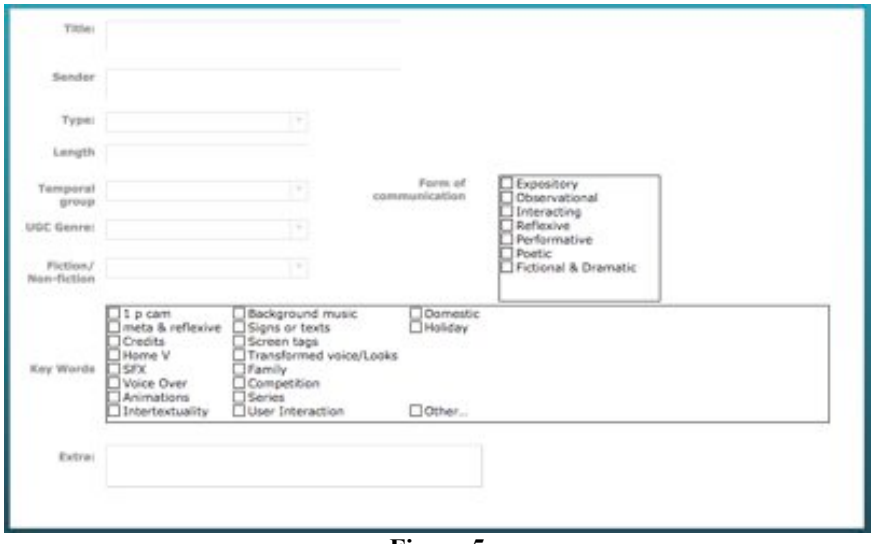


Figure 5

[3] Meta-commenting is understood as explicit reflections on the making of the videos.
[4] The registration of intertextuality is concretely the registrations of oral, written or visual references to other discourses. Coders have been presented with a definition that is similar to the understanding suggested by Julia Kristeva (1980, p. 36).
[5] The registrations of affordances are limited to the video itself, meaning that comments, links and ratings were not observed by the coders.

Inter-rater reliability
In order to provide the data with a high degree of reliability, two coders coded the same 900 videos, and with inspiration from Landry and Guzdial (2008) and Molyneaux et al. (2008), an inter-rater reliability test (*X^2 test*) of data homogeneity was conducted, which indicated reliability between the coders[6].

Results
Through the coding scheme, it is possible to describe each UGC category with further detail, as well as to determine the frequencies for each category. The frequencies of the categories are illustrated in Figure 6.

UGC categories (473 videos)

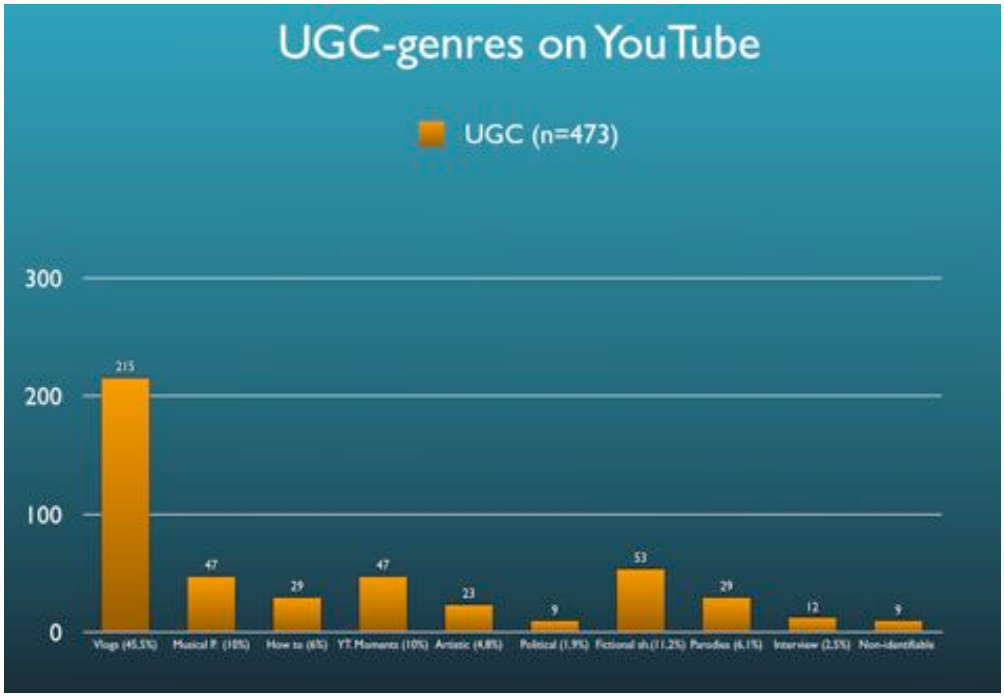


Figure 6

In the following, each category is described briefly based on the most relevant characteristics of the observations. This is followed by a discussion of the general registrations and how the different components of the genre model affect this. The categories are listed in no specific order.

Vlogs – 215 (45.5%)
The *Vlog* category dominates the sample and confirms the observations made by Burgess and Green, who also registered a high proportion of Vlogs in their sample (2009, p. 53). Further, intertextuality represents a high proportion (68%), and the use of meta-commentaries (82%) even

[6] Following the argument of *statistical significance* (cf. Freedman et al., 1991), the null-hypothesis was rejected in the test, thus indicating a very strong degree of homogeneity among coders. But due to limited space, the results and data are not included in this article.

higher. The latter indicates an explicit self-reflection, where the creators integrate the process of making videos. This aspect is also indicated by the high integration of annotations (64%) that function as paratextual comment tracks, which encourage users to subscribe, rate or link to other videos. The dominant form of representation is the performative (82%), which according to Nichols (2001) is characterised by the creator's subjective mode and performative role that is adapted to the social space of YouTube. Finally, traditional home movie themes (cf. Chalfen, 1987), such as the filming of domestic (40%), holiday (9%) or family (20%) situations are less apparent in the Vlogs category. Although still noticeable, this indicates a change of audience from private family members to the involvement of public users who demand a higher degree of entertainment and performance.

Musical Performances – 47 (9.9%)
The aspect of self-presentation is also present in the *Musical Performances* category. This category involves both first-person videos (44%) and home video recordings (19%), while a third type of musical performance includes user generated music videos (36%). This category reflects both existing music video conventions and is also a parallel to popular reality shows such as *America's Got Talent* and *The X-factor*. The primary judgments in the television shows are made by judges, while the judgements in the musical performances are based on user ratings (57% of the videos in the category are from the Top-rated category). In that sense, the user-interaction affordances of YouTube replace the generic characteristics of the physical judge.

How to – 29 (6%)
The *How to* category is primarily characterised by a didactic form of representation (93%) and partially by the use of voice-over (44%) rather than first-person camera (24%). This category further includes a high degree of meta-commenting (72%) and rather high appearance of intertextuality (44%). The high rate of meta-commenting is related to a "behind-the scene" role that many of the videos have, since they are explanations and illustrations of how the UGC was made, also indicated by the highest percentage in the sample of the reflexive representation form (24%). This category is primarily informative and less aesthetically orientated and has the lowest use of SFX (6.8%).

YouTube moments – 47 (9.9%)
The *YouTube moments* are characterised by a high dominance of the observational form (94%) that in many ways resembles the home video format known from, e.g., *America's Funniest Home Videos.* This category is dominated by the videos with the highest views (69% are found in the most viewed categories). The videos are primarily registrations of everyday reality without much use of narrative forms (only 4% of the videos include credits, 10% involve background music). None of the videos include direct user-involvement, and, further, it is the category with the lowest percentage of intertextuality (25%) and meta-commenting (14.5%).

Artistic and lyric – 23 (4.8%)
This category, as described in the pre-defined characteristics, emphasises aesthetics. Therefore it is no surprise that the dominating form of communication is the poetic form (74%), which according to Nichols (1991) highlights aesthetic codes. It is also the category with the highest involvement of animations (56%), SFX (35%) and background music (74%).

Political Statements – 9 (1.9%)
The smallest category in the sample is the *Political Statements* category. The videos in this category are predominantly didactic (89%), and it is the category with the largest proportion of voice-over (55.5%), where the use of signs and texts are frequently integrated (78%). One explanation for the relatively low proportion of political statements is because this is a sample of popular culture on the premises of entertainment, while much of the political content on YouTube is found within smaller channels that are absent from the most popular browsing categories.

Fictional short movies & sketches – 53 (11.2%)
This is the second largest category, and it resembles the narrative and plot structure known from the television and film media. This is indicated by a relatively high use of credits (51%) and signs and texts (49%). Forty-one percent of the videos were registered with a high production value. Rather surprisingly, forty-two percent of the videos also include a meta-commenting layer that comments on the production process, which turns the viewer's attention away from the diegetic world of the video.

Parodies – 29 (6.1%)
The *Parodies* are intertextual on the basis of their imitation of other texts, and it is therefore no surprise that this proportion was very high (91%). The majority of these videos, furthermore, have been coded as fictional (94%), which includes parodies on other categories (30% imitate music videos), other traditional film genres or trailers. This mix of references to already existing genres also reflects the registrations where no characteristic key words seem to dominate.

Interview and Reportage – 12 (2.5%)
This category could also be considered a subgenre to the Vlogs, since it also focuses on the role of the creator, but in a less performative and self-promoting way. It is instead characterised by the interacting form of communication (75%), where the creator takes on the role of an interviewer either through reportages or studio set-ups. They have a high proportion of meta-communication (67%) and high integration of signs and texts (67%), and are all coded as non-fiction.

General observations
These categories are fluid and contain many subgenres and cross-genres that overlap; but based on the registrations and consistency among coders, I argue it is possible to distinguish UGC categories using registrations, which can serve as a useful analytical tool.

With a proportion representing 46% of the UGC, Vlogs dominate this sample, but across the different categories, the overall rates of intertextuality (59%) and meta-commenting (59%) are noticeable. The use of intertextual codes can partly be explained by the implementation of already existing categories, such as the fictional shorts and parodies, as well as musical performances. But the high dominance of intertextuality also reflects the communication through culturally shared codes of what can be interpreted as a form of YouTube literacy. The use of intertextuality can be regarded as a communication discourse of YouTube that reflects both the socio-cultural everyday life in accordance with Goffman, but also as the transformation of the institutional organisation of centralised media platforms towards more differentiated and decentralised media platforms.

To argue that YouTube has evolved into completely new genres is to ignore the clear resemblance and inspiration from the television and film cultures that many of the UGC categories in this sample also mirror. In regards to this, it is also worth noting the appearance of non-fiction. In this sample,

58% were coded as non-fiction. Although reflecting a tendency, it can be drawn as a parallel to the so-called *Reality movement*, which has been analysed in television content (Jerslev et al., 2002) as well as a great deal of the content on the Internet (cf. Miller & Shepherd, 2009). An interesting aspect is that a large number of the videos coded as non-fiction also contain meta-comments. In many of the UGC coded as non-fiction, the creators turn the viewers' attention towards the filmic process, thus breaking the representational space of the non-fiction video. This results in a form of communication that is somewhat different from, e.g., news programmes and traditional documentaries, but not necessarily less authentic. This aspect can moreover be related to the viewing process on YouTube, in which a video is enclosed by links, demographic stats, signs and texts which all remind the audience of the viewing situation and thereby naturalise the integration of meta-commenting compared to the traditional cinematic experience as argued by Metz (1982) for example.

The main affordances such as linking and commenting have not been registered in this article, since they are meta-data or paratextual layers surrounding the content of the video. Within the content of the videos, the use of annotations has been registered and the overall percentage of 57% indicates that the use of direct links and additional content information are integrated into UGC and contribute to the meta-commenting and informative levels of the videos. The annotations also contribute to YouTube's flow and characterise aspects of the navigation process within the UGC as a *folksonomy*. This folksonomy basically supersedes the need for the construction of a formal typology, since users can choose to navigate through annotations, thus excluding the taxonomic choice that the cinema audience for example makes use of.

The competitive and hierarchical structure of YouTube favours popular content, where certain trends seem to predominate the majority of the content. This includes the self-reflecting first-person role that can be described as a performance representational form (48%), a proportion that of course is highly mirrored in the dominance of the Vlogs, but nonetheless reveals a particular consistency in the sample. Furthermore, of the 473 videos in this sample, there are only 240 different senders, also illustrated by a high percentage of videos that are a part of a series (59%). That the sample represents a rather homogenous group of YouTube creators is moreover revealed in the fact that the 10 most frequent creators account for 26% of all UGC in the sample. The so-called *Pro-ams* thereby seem to dominate this sample, also exemplified in the fact that the 10 most represented senders are all part of the YouTube Partner Programme[7], i.e., those who are paid for visibility (ratings and subscriptions).

Conclusion

This article has identified aspects of the navigation processes on YouTube tied to technological properties and simultaneously recognised how in different ways these organise YouTube's content. The article has advocated a generic model based on a pragmatic approach that is extended to include a *medium theory* inspired focus on the affordances of YouTube. It demonstrates that the affordances provide a co-contributing role in the formation of UGC categories exemplified in the

[7] The 10 most represented senders in this sample are all represented on YouTube's official partner programme lists: http://www.youtube.com/channels?s=ms&t=a&g=5

use of annotations, tags, link structure and comments that enable users to navigate outside conventional categories. The generic dynamism and changeability of YouTube are further expressed in an emphasis on intertextuality and meta-commenting, which seem to be integrated in the proposed categories, and where already conventional content can be regarded in a new communicative context. These categories are characterised as a coexistence of antecedent genres and new genres. This is also a consequence of agency, institutional organisation and YouTube affordances, which provide the principal modes of navigation throughout UCG. The proposed categories in this article are by no means exclusive, but are specifically defined and referred to in the context of the outlined data sample.

With the integration of technological affordances along with the dominance of popular content and the competitive structure, the question inevitably posed is the following: is there a *need* for genres on YouTube? Does the lack of a traditional set of taxonomies really seem to matter for the further expansion of YouTube? When we look at the increasing number of videos that is currently being consumed, the immediate answer must be no. This is evident in the insufficiency of the already existing categories that are random and too thematically tied, but nevertheless present. Furthermore, the categories proposed in this article are not a necessary requirement for navigating on YouTube, but they are provided with a wider aspect of communication modes, user-interaction as well as aesthetic characteristics. On YouTube, conventional categories are therefore not indispensable navigation tools or cultural practices. The cultural practice of YouTube to some extent can be described as a *folksonomy* accentuated by the user-driven interface and technological properties. But as it has also been argued, users are forced to navigate through mechanisms controlled by the YouTube organisation, which consequently has created a competing environment where the popular content is being favoured, thus superseding the need for navigation through conventional typologies.
In conclusion, the creation of a typology of the UGC is therefore first and foremost useful in an analytical context, where a generic approach and understanding of the UGC is essential in order to navigate and comprehend an overview of the content of YouTube that otherwise would appear unsystematic and unfocused. It is, therefore, first and foremost of methodological usage within this sample as a process of identifying certain types of content.

References:

Askehave, I. & Nielsen, A. (2004). *Webmediated genres: a challenge to traditional genre theory*. Aarhus: Center for Virksomhedskommunikation. Handelshøjskolen i Århus.

Briggs, C. & Bauman, R. (1992). Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, 2(2)*, 131-172.

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Buckingham**,** D. (2009). A commonplace art? Understanding Amateur Media Production. In D. Buckingham & R. Willet (eds). *Video Cultures* (pp.23-50). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Burgess, J. & J. Green (2009). *YouTube, Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cha, M., H. Kwak, P.Rodriguez, Y.Ahn, & S.Moon (2007). I Tube, You Tube, everybody tubes. Paper presented at IMC 07, October 24-26, 2007, San Diego California. USA. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from: www.portal.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1298309

Chalfen, R. (1987). *Snapshot Versions of Life*. Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
Chouliaraki, L. & N. Fairclough (1999). *Discourse in the late modernity.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
Dijck, J.V. (2009). Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media Culture Society*, *31 (1),* 41-58.
Eliason, E. & J. Lundberg (2006)**.** The appropriateness of Swedish municipality web site designs. Paper presented at the NordiCHI '06 Proceedings of the 4th Nordic conference on Human-computer interaction. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download%3Fdoi%3D10.1.1.101.7972%26rep%3Drep1%26type%3Dpdf
Fiske, J. (1987). *Television Culture.* London: Routledge.
Freedman, D., R. Pisani, R. Purves & A. Adhikari (1991). *Statistics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
Giltrow, J. & D. Stein (2009). Genres in the Internet: Innovation, evolution and genre theory. In J. Giltrow & D. Stein (eds.), *Genres in the Internet* (pp.1-26). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
Gibson, J. (1986). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. New York: Psychology Press.
Goffman, E. (1984). *Frame Analysis.* Boston: Northeastern University Press.
Habermas, J. (2006). Ein avantgardistischer Spürsinn für Relevanzen. Dankesrede bei der Entgegennahme des Bruno-Kreisky-Preises, Renner Institut. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from: www.renner-institut.at/.../texte/habermas2006-03-09.pdf
Hjarvard**,** S. (2008). *En verden af medier*. Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.
Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture*. New York: N.Y. University Press.
Jerslev, A. (2002). Introduction. In Anne Jerslev (eds.), *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media* (pp.7-14). København: Northern Lights.
Kristeva, Julia (1980). *Desire in Language: A semiotic Approach to Literature and art*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Landry, B.. & M. Guzdial (2008). Art or Circus? Characterizing User-created Video on YouTube. Atlanta: Georgia Institute of Technology. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from: www.smartech.gatech.edu/bitstream/1853/25828/1/GT-IC-08-07.pdf
Leadbeater, C. & P. Miller (2004). *The Pro-am Revolution.* London: Demos
Lister, M., J. Dovey, S. Giddings, I. Grant & K. Kelly (2009). *New Media: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge.
Lundby, K. (2008). *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories: self-representations in new media*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
Metz, C. (1982*). The Imaginary Signifier: psychoanalysis and the cinema.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Miller, C. (1984). Genre as Social Action*. Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *70*, 151-167.
Miller, C. & D. Shepherd (2009). Questions for genre theory form the blogosphere**.** In J. Giltrow & D. Stein (eds.), *Genres in the Internet* (pp.263-290). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
Molyneaux, H., S. O'Donnell, K. Gibson & J. Singer (2008). Exploring the gender Divide on YouTube*. The American Communication Journal*, *10 (2),* 1-14.
Neale, S. (1990). Questions of Genre. *Screen, 31 (1),* 45-66.
Nichols, B. (1991). *Representing Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Nichols, B. (2001). *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Palmer, J. (1990). Genrer og medier – et kort overblik. *MedieKultur 14,* 5-17.

Shepherd, M. & C. Watters (1999).The Functionality Attribute of Cybergenres**.** Paper presented at Proceedings of the 32nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences 1999.
Simons, J. (2008). Another take on tags – what tags tell. In G. Lovink & S. Niedererer (eds.), *Video Vortex Reader – Responses to YouTube* (pp. 239-254). Amsterdam: Amsterdam Institute of Network Culture.
Stam, R.(2000). *Film Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Stauff, M. (2009). Sports on YouTube. In P. Snickars & P. Vonderau (eds.), *The YouTube Reader* (pp. 236-251). Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.
Swales, J.(1990). *Genre Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Todorov, T. (1990). *Genres in Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Tudor, A. (1974). *Theories of Film*. New York: Viking Press, Cinema One Series.
Wasko, J. & M. Erickson 2009. The Political Economy of YouTube. In P. Snickars & P.Vonderau (eds.), *The YouTube Reader* (pp. 372-386). Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.
Westenberg, P. Affinity Video. In G. Lovink & S. Niedererer (eds.), *Video Vortex Reader – Responses to YouTube* (pp. 283-292). Amsterdam: Amsterdam Institute of Network Culture.
Young, P. (2008). Film Genre Theory and Contemporary Media. In R. Kolker (ed.), *Film and Media Studies* (pp.224-259). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Wall, T. (2005) Folksonomy Definition and Wikipedia. Retrieved May 5, 2011 from http://www.vanderwal.net/random/entrysel.php?blog=1750

Thomas Mosebo Simonsen
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Communication and Psychology
University of Aalborg, Denmark
tms@hum.aau.dk

……

The Mashups of YouTube

This article focuses on YouTube Mashups and how we can understand them as a specific subgenre on YouTube. The Mashups are analysed as audiovisual transformations that are given new contextual meaning, e.g., of collaborative social communities or individual promotional purposes. Mashups moreover are discussed through a theoretical approach to terms like "Vernacular Creativity" and a revisited understanding of "remediation".

Through these approaches, the article further investigates how Mashups derive from a widespread popular culture and how the emergence of Mashups is influenced by the accessibility of YouTube as a media platform. The overall argument is that the novelty of Mashups is not found in its formal characteristics, but rather in its social and communicative abilities within the YouTube community – both as acts of collaboration and participation, but also as acts of individual promotion.

Methodologically, the article draws on empirically based observations and within this, examples of Mashups are included in order to demonstrate their different aspects.

Users of YouTube must sometimes wonder why certain videos are capable of attracting millions of views and comments. This includes the video, *The Double Rainbow Song* appears to be a music video, in which a home video and its voiceover, through the use of a phase vocoder, are turned into song. It is basically a transformation of a home video into a song. The original video is a home movie made by a camper, who is on a trip in the mountains when he observes a double rainbow in the sky. He reacts very emotionally in the voiceover, resulting in many viewers coming to the conclusion that he was affected by drugs. Due to its funny expressions and its popularity, it was recombined and mixed into *The Double Rainbow Song*, a so-called "Autotune" that in the following I will characterise as a specific form of an increasingly popular form of YouTube content: the "Mashup". *The Double Rainbow Song* has received more than 28 million views on YouTube, 90,000 comments and 130 video responses. I argue that the success of *The Double Rainbow Song* must be found in its ability to communicate a shared reference of popular culture that is specifically consumed and understood by participation in YouTube's widespread community, to which I shall return. A successful Mashup captures the essence of YouTube's shared culture (in this case, the original Double Rainbow home movie) and turns it into an audiovisual expressive commentary that becomes a creative expression, i.e., its ability to connect to people within the same community.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the Mashup genre on YouTube. As mentioned above, a Mashup is a specific form of user-generated content (UGC) that re-combines already existing content, or as stated by William Urrichio: [Mashups are] "(…) individual videos that make use of disparately sourced sounds and images remixed into a new composite" (2009, p. 24).

This article intends to contribute to an understanding of the Mashups by providing a characterisation and identification of the Mashup genre on YouTube. It is, I argue, a characterisation that mirrors an overall understanding of the YouTube website as a vacillation between two co-existing functions, where we can regard YouTube as a collective media archive controlled and consumed by ordinary users (e.g., the social context of *The Double Rainbow Song)*, but at the same time we must consider YouTube as a commercial platform, where content is increasingly created and distributed as a commodity (e.g., the commercial function of *The Double Rainbow Song* sold on iTunes and the online shop selling related merchandise). Accordingly, the YouTube Mashup ranges between collective creative expressions and individually promotional and commercially-driven creations.

I will moreover attempt to apply this co-existence to a revision of Bolter and Grusin (1999)'s term; "remediation" and the double-logic of "immediacy" and "hypermediacy", which will be discussed in regards to the YouTube Mashups and bridged to Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's understanding of "Vernacular Creativity" (2009). From this starting point, the question posed is whether we can consider Mashups on YouTube as *new forms of communications or whether they are just remediations and imitations of already established forms of content?*
In order to address this question, the article also draws on an empirical study conducted through a content sample of some of the most popular YouTube videos. Finally, selective cases will be presented in order to describe the scope of the Mashups.

Methodological frame
The videos included in the analyses presented in this article are drawn from an empirical study of YouTube content. Nine-hundred videos were observed during the summer of 2010, gathered from the available browsing categories of YouTube's most popular content ("Most Viewed" (n = 300), "Most Discussed" (n = 300) and "Top-Rated" (n = 300)). Through a coding process, Mashup videos were identified as a specific type of UGC. UGC, in relation to YouTube, refers to audiovisual videos that are created by producers who are not producing videos distributed on electronic media. The differences between UGC and non-UGC, besides distribution forms, can also be determined through agency and the usage of medium specific affordances.
As defined above, Mashups are a specific type of UGC that favour the collage style and remix style of different types of content. The Mashups are communicative audiovisual texts different from other types of UGC that tend to favour first-person presentations of the creator (e.g., video blogging), whereas the creator of a Mashup is rarely visually present.
I have defined an overall distinction between four types of content, and between UGC and non-UGC. There are two types of non-UGC: music videos (MV) and television highlights (TVH), which involve cross-media content already distributed on other platforms outside the perimeters of YouTube. There are also two types of UGC: regular UGC and Mashups. Although a Mashup is also UGC and could be considered a sub-category to UGC, I have nonetheless chosen to make an overall distinction based on the Mashup's characteristic of explicitly re-combining audiovisual content into a new video.

After the removal of duplicates and non-identifiable content, there is a sample of 737 videos:

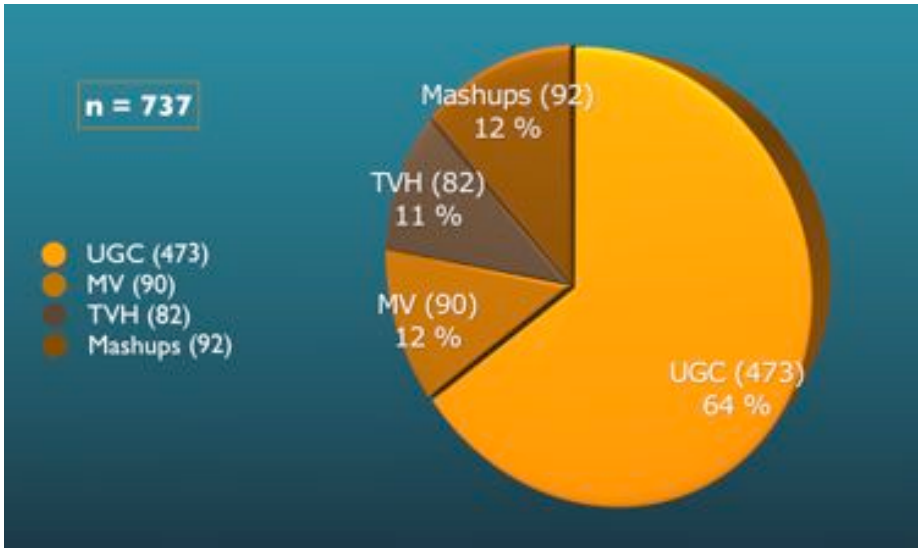


Figure # 1

Overall, the distinction between UGC and non-UGC, and furthermore between UGC and Mashups result in a sample of 92 videos that in the following will be referred to as Mashups. The sample is by no means an extensive representation of YouTube's content, but it provides us with an indication of the Mashup as a specific type of content that in this sample is equally widespread in comparison with MV and TVH. The sample thus enables an identification of the different types of Mashups and their functionality, which will be elaborated in the following.
Initially the article briefly identifies the Mashup in a historical context and seeks to identify its principle characteristics and how we can regard the Mashup as a cultural component constantly evolving along with the changeability of YouTube as a media platform.

The emergence of Mashup
Throughout the 20th century, there are several examples of techniques resembling the creation of Mashups, e.g., in the aesthetic practices of cubist artists such as Picasso and Braque or the principle of the "Ready Mades" (cf. Hebdige 1979), as well as the editorial techniques of Vertov in the early 1920s (cf. Michelson 1984). What distinguishes Mashups from a painting by Picasso or a film by Vertov is the overall context within which the content is consumed. While cubist paintings are regarded as elitist art, Mashups are a manifestation of a mass consumption of popular culture, produced and consumed within a folkloric context that involves the potentiality of user-participation between creators and viewers, and collective creativity in a shared YouTube community. The YouTube community is not officially defined, but frequently referred to by many YouTubers. It can be regarded as a shared space of intertextual references and knowledge of famous YouTubers, in which everybody can enter and contribute (also see Strangelove 2010, p. 103 ff.).

Vertov emphasised in his manifest of *KinoEye* the existence of a latent creativity in regards to people's creativity of the everyday:

> Everyone has something of the poet, artist, musician (…) The million part of each man's inventiveness in his everyday work contains an element of art (Michelson 1984, p.162).

Although written in 1924 and with a political tone (being propaganda), Vertov describes a principle, which is similar to how we can understand Mashups' involvement in everydayness.

Accessibility is perhaps the most significant characteristic of the emergence of a Mashup culture. On YouTube, everybody has access to everything, which makes creating content available for everybody with a camera and a motivation to produce videos. Besides the unlimited accessibility, YouTube has grown to become the world's largest online media archive, where consumption of videos as of May 2011 has exceeded 3 billion a day and where 48 hours of content is uploaded every minute[1]. YouTube seems thus to have embraced the notion of Mashups as a somewhat inherent exploration in turns of its status as a media archive, making it the perfect breeding ground for creating new content, i.e., mixing already existing content. This is furthermore related to the technological developments that enable people easier access to technology. Technological development therefore also demonstrates how we can understand the change from Cubism, Dada and Russian Montage to Mashups as an example of the overt shift of ordinary people's accessibility to media in terms of production and consumption.

The bricolage style of YouTube

The specific act of editing and recombining different texts within the Mashups is a process similar to what Lévi-Strauss has coined "bricolage". Bricolage describes the ability to make creative use of the materials made available from "whatever is at hand", and it is a "raw" or "naïve" art (1962, p.17). Drawing on Lévi-Strauss, Terence Hawkes describes the bricolage as:

> (…) the means by which the non-literate, non-technical mind of so-called 'primitive' man responds to the world around him. The process involves a 'science of the concrete' (as opposed to our 'civilized' science of the 'abstract') (2003, p.51).

The bricolage is concerned with a "science of the concrete". The concrete is the cultural texts of everyday life that is given new meaning in the bricolage. Unlike, e.g., Dada or Pop-art, which have attained cultural recognition through art communities and distributions of museums, Mashups are styles of bricolage that so far have been distributed on YouTube in a context that first and foremost is associated with light entertainment (cf. Burgess and Green 2009) or even the mundane and tasteless (cf. Keen 2007). On YouTube, everybody has a voice and the ability to become visible, which has resulted in an enormous melting pot of different creative expressions that everybody can publish their opinion about and spread through different social media platforms.

An inherent characteristic of the Mashup is its reliance on intertextuality. The integration of intertextuality is related to a shared mainstream culture from which many Mashups are created and meaning generated through intertextual references. This is also parallel to Paul Miller's description of the music "Remix-culture" emerging in the 1980's, where both remix and Mashups resemble a "shared folk culture, where creative expression is the property of the community" (Miller et al 2008, p. 101). The effect of this shared culture and its collective reference points, according to Miller, lead to an intertextual space of references that calls for pre-existing and experienced cultural knowledge in order to participate in the community. This is also the principle characteristic of the "Participatory Culture" as coined by Henry Jenkins. Jenkins argues that a major change between previous and present fan-cultures, emerging with digital media and the Internet, is that creators of fan media are no longer niche content creators, but producing and creating in a public space: "The

[1] cf..TNW Events: / http://thenextweb.com/google/2011/05/25/youtube-hits-3-billion-views-per-day-2-days-worth-of-video-uploaded-every-minute/ Retrieved, May 2, 2011.

Web provides an exhibition outlet moving amateur filmmaking from private into public space" (2006, p. 142).

A revision of remediation

The principle and the components of the Mashups are analogous to already existing collage forms. On YouTube, Mashups derive from a shared popular culture and they transform content in a process analogous to the recycling principles of collage as described by Bolter and Grusin:

> In all cases, the artist is defining a space through the disposition and interplay of forms that have been detached from their original context and then recombined" (1999, p. 39).

Bolter and Grusin regard the collage as a historical example and specific type of "remediation" ("the representation of one medium in another", ibid. p. 45). YouTube Mashups likewise explicitly remediate film and television content. In regards to digital media, Bolter and Grusin argue that remediation could be experienced by the viewer manifested in an interconnected logic of two forms of remediations: "immediacy" as a transparent interface where the "user is not aware of confronting a medium" (ibid. p. 24) and "hypermediacy" that seeks to depict the real through turning attention towards its own construction (ibid. p. 31). In the late 1990s, these terms were primarily addressed as logics of how audience experienced the formal features and technological affordances of new media, either represented as an invisible style (exemplified by early virtual reality communities) or a fragmented distanced style (e.g., the WWW). Following this distinction, the YouTube Mashups, in terms of style, are per se examples of hypermediacy. The Mashup combines, through fragmentation and deconstruction, different styles, and it turns its focus towards its own process of production.

Don Tapscott argues that technology is increasingly considered invisible among the so-called "Net Gen", the youngest generation of Internet users: "Technology has been seen completely transparent to the Net Gen (…) It's like air." (2009, p. 19). Parallel to this, we could ask whether the specific technology of Mashups and their consumption through, e.g., links or comments on YouTube are still experienced as heterogeneity or divergence. In all fairness, Richard Grusin has also revisited the focus point of remediation, as he argues that the double logic of remediation is somewhat different after 9/11 (cf. Grusin 2009, p. 63). According to Grusin, immediacy "materializes itself as an unconstrained connectivity so that one can access with no restrictions" (ibid, p. 63.), while hypermediacy is linked to connectivity in terms of the control or surveillance of this.

In regards to YouTube, Grusin sees the site as an example of the revisited logic behind remediation in terms of its distribution and logic of navigating through content:

> YouTube provides perhaps the paradigmatic instance of this new media formation, insofar as its popularity is less a result of having provided users with new and better forms of media than of making available more mediation events, more easily shared and distributed (ibid. p. 65).

Grusin implies that YouTube has not gained its widespread success due to specific forms of content, but due to its ability to connect and make ordinary people visible. On YouTube, people navigate through hyperlinks and Video On Demand (VOD) methods and new meaning is just as much created in the paratextual contexts. The Mashups fit perfectly with this interchange of meaning, suggesting that rather than specific new forms of content, principles of accessibility and connectivity characterise the features of the YouTube Mashup. Immediacy on YouTube is thus the flow and communication about remediated content through hyperlink, comments, ratings and video responding. Grusin's description of a new hypermediacy is more diffuse, but in regards to

YouTube, it can be interpreted as the mental awareness of being visible or connected in accordance with YouTube as multi-functional, serving many co-existing functions embedded in various social networks.

Formal distance through techniques of bricolage does not seem to differ fundamentally from the large amount of regular UGC that also integrates meta-commenting layers reflecting upon themselves as textual constructions, e.g., by involving self-reflexive commentaries or "behind the scene" clips. The difference is perhaps more in the explicit communicative context that the Mashup is a carrier of. The exchange of information is literally taking place in the audiovisual text where the Mashup becomes a direct primary commentator and distributor of the shared cultural knowledge and social connectivity on YouTube, which in regular UGC is predominantly taking place through secondary texts (e.g., comments and ratings). This is moreover fundamentally linked to the YouTube community identified as the collective shared intertextual references of popular content and popular producers on YouTube.

Summing up, immediacy on YouTube is the engagement and sense making through social community, where navigation takes place in accordance with watching videos, reading comments and video responding, while hypermediacy reveals the double-logic in understanding YouTube as a multifunctional site where meaning can be divergent and potentially heterogenic.

Mashups as Vernacular Culture

The concrete creative task of a Mashup lies in the editing process and requires certain technical skills, but creating a Mashup is also a process of positioning yourself in relationship to the objects you are combining, either through acknowledgment (e.g., fan videos or homages) or through distance in terms of mocking or parodying. In both situations, this leads to a position where the creator addresses the already existing community. Jean Burgess applies the term "Vernacular Creativity" as a depiction of how creative practices have changed with the emergence of new media and how users increasingly participate in the public exchange of content, leading to a change in consumption. Vernacular Creativity is thus "(…) a poetics of everyday talk and performance that cuts across both 'high' and 'low' culture" (cf. 2007, pp. 30-31).

In their volume on YouTube, Burgess together with Joshua Green moreover describe Vernacular Creativity as a feature of the participatory culture, where the process of creating becomes a social practice: "the creation and sharing of videos functions culturally as a means of social networking as opposed to a mode of cultural production" (2009, p.26). They argue that the motivation for uploading videos has just as much to do with the engagement of social networking as it does exhibitionism and self-promotion. Even though, the creation of Mashups has a range of many different purposes, following Burgess and Green, it is noticeable how many Mashups are consumed within a shared community.

Consider the most viewed Mashup video on YouTube, *Bed Intruder Song*, with more than 92 million views. Like *Double Rainbow Song*, it is an ironic music video: an Autotune that mixes and transforms an interview into a song. The video is a parody of an already existing video on YouTube (*Antoine Dodson warns a PERP*). *Bed Intruder Song* is an example of Vernacular Creativity that first and foremost is a creative piece of work in the sense that it captures an essence of humour that is shared among other YouTubers and which primarily makes sense within the YouTube community, where users obviously are familiar with the original clip. It is difficult to identify the video's qualities in regards to originality or musical quality, but the song was nonetheless a huge commercial success on iTunes.

One explanation for its popularity is perhaps its intertextual references addressing the YouTube community members by expressing a collective voice that in this case ironically distances itself from the original clip. *Bed Intruder Song* turns a TV clip of a disturbed person into a creative work that has no traditionally acknowledged creative value; but it transforms the everydayness into a humoristic interpretation and in that sense the Autotune is an explicit case of Vernacular Creativity. Its most important feature becomes its articulation of a shared community that furthermore spreads the video through social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

Collaborative Creativity

Axel Bruns, following Jenkins and Burgess and Green, advocates, with the emergence of social media, a change in the audiovisual distribution and production process of participation and user-driven activity. Along these lines, he stresses how a Mashup is defined by an on-going creative process:

> 'Mashups': composite, multiply layered, and repeatedly reedited artworks which in themselves remain also temporary artefacts of an ongoing creative process (2008, p.235).

According to Bruns, a Mashup is also a co-creation, which is collaborative and involves not only the Mashup videos, but also the videos that surround them. This understanding of Mashups can be well illustrated in Ridley Scott's *Life in a Day* project or in a series of videos on YouTube, the *Where do you YouTube* series[2]. The series represents an on-going creative process, in which users make a video response that links to the previous video and at the same time the series imitates the style of the original video. Bruns states that many social media sites are inherently based on collaboration and sharing. The scale of individual creativity is therefore downgraded and replaced by a collaborative creativity*:*

> (…) the idea of the creative work, are substantially affected by community-based produsage efforts, as these undermine the idea of the work itself as a complete finished, and defined entity (2008, p. 231).

Collaborative creativity for Bruns therefore is an on-going process rather than a finished work. Bruns exemplifies this with the photo collages of *Flickr*, the music-remixing site *ccMixter* and *Wikipedia*. While sites such as *Wikipedia* and *Flickr* perfectly demonstrate Bruns' perception of the intentioned and explicit collective collaborations, it is necessary to critically raise the question whether YouTube is also inherently defined by a collective creative voice. Is a video like *Bed Intruder Song* a collaborative work, because it recombines already existing popular content on YouTube?

Bed Intruder Song clearly exemplifies that a Mashup is arguably a collaborative piece of work in terms of the direct involvement of texts made by other creators, which provide the video with many voices. *Bed Intruder Song* is, nevertheless, only the source that leads to co-creativity, and the video is itself not a collective work made by many YouTubers. It is instead a fragment of popular culture available to be transformed into something new.

The understanding of creative collaboration in regards to the video therefore is not different across other media platforms. Books are published in collaboration with editors, films have production teams, and in this sense videos on YouTube are also collaborative. But the process of collecting material and transforming this material does not inherently involve a collective voice. *Bed Intruder*

[2] These videos are analysed in detail by Adami (2009)*'We/YouTube': Exploring sign-making in video-interaction*.

Song is the result of collaborative creativity, and the creator *Schmoyoho* is recombining already existing content, but the new meaning and change of genre (the transformation of news footage into a satirical music video) are not the result of a collaborative process that is fundamentally different from other media creations.

Figure # 2: *Bed Intruder Song*

Following the aforementioned revision of remediation, the understanding of immediacy as connectivity can be juxtaposed with the social functionality of Vernacular Creativity if we extend the proposed focus on remediation to involve a communicative and social aspect. This revision, however, also involves the hypermediacy logic that turns the focus towards the fact that the vernacular must be regarded in relationship to how Mashups can also appear divergently as individual self-promotional creations, as exponents of YouTube's commercial structure.

Mashup-gaming cultures

So far, I have argued that the Mashups are very much understood in explicit relationship to a community on YouTube and that this community at the same time is producing content that can be regarded as commodities. In this last part of the article, I will further elaborate on this by providing representative examples of Mashups taken from the aforementioned sample.

A comprehensive way to create an overview of the Mashups is to identify what is being "mashup'ed". In this sample consisting of 92 videos, a predominance of the videos can be identified as Mashups of computer games. Fifty-six (61%) of the Mashup videos derive from computer games in the form of gaming commentary videos, game play music videos or narrative video told through the integration of computer games (often referred to as "Machinima"). Machinima is animated filmmaking using an already existing gaming aesthetics. Mashups have emerged from the 1990's gameplay recordings of e.g. *Doom* and *Quake* (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machinima.

The gaming videos exemplify widespread collaborative creativity deriving from various different fan communities that have emerged from popular fan videos. Bruns (2008, p. 232), drawing on Jenkins, emphasises fan communities as a key example of creative collaboration and participation.

The noticeable dominance of computer games perhaps also reflects that computer games are no longer a subculture, but are a part of mainstream culture. Another explanation is the fact that many computer games now enable recordings of user-interactions and thereby provide users with a predefined style and an aesthetic that make the access and creation of their own videos much easier.

Nineteen (20%) of the videos in the sample are uploaded by the community channel *Machinima* and its sub-channel *Machinimarespawn*. The videos from *Machinima* are authorless in that sense that the videos are produced by users who upload their videos directly to *Machinima*, which then becomes the collective voice of the video. In that sense, *Machinima* exemplifies the collaborative creativity that Jenkins and Bruns are reporting. Here creators establish a community in which they share their works and receive feedback. The style and form of the gaming videos are hence dictated by the original computer games, where the creative process, in terms of narratives and aesthetics, is already designed by the original game (also see cf. Diakopoulos et al. 2007).

This is evident in many of the Gaming Mashups, which involve the same characters and settings, In that sense, we can also consider them "pastiches-as-homages", described by Gerard Genette [3] (1997, pp. 102 & 160). The Mashups moreover refer to a gaming environment that demands direct participation, i.e., many videos derive from humorous explorations of a game (e.g., *Skate 3 bloopers…*) or serve a more communicative purpose with initiated reference to the gaming universe.

Socialising through gaming commentaries

The latter aspect is demonstrated in the most frequent type of gaming videos in the sample. Thirty-three out of 56 gaming videos can be identified as gaming commentaries made by users, who through a voiceover explain and demonstrate game skills, while playing, e.g., *Modern Warfare 2*. The gaming commentaries are Mashups when re-combining a computer game recording with a newly produced audio track that transforms the fictional gaming world into didactic and non-fictional reflections on gaming cultures that include both concrete gaming comments as well as everyday life reflections, contributing to the creation of new meaning beyond the basic gaming activity.

The Mashup *Taylor Tuesday #22 (…) ThatGoldenBullet12* exemplifies a transformation of a game into an everyday reflection. Two people, who we learn are a couple, intend to comment on a game play of *Modern Warfare 2* that is sent to them by another player. They, however, pay little attention to the game, which then becomes a peripheral visual layer. Instead the couple starts a conversation on everyday topics, such as parenthood and pets, that have nothing to do with the game they are watching and intended to reflect upon. The video is thereby given a phatic function, communicating everyday reflections. In that sense, it becomes an example of Vernacular Creativity, more concerned with communicative practices than with the aesthetics of the game. It can also be regarded as a remediation in terms of its transformation of the computer game medium into a personal online presentation of a couple and their everyday reflection, with the intention of establishing new social meaning.

The video is collaborative in terms of the combination of commentaries, but the collaboration is unbalanced since the visual layer of the video is not given attention, and as argued, it only figures as background "noise". The explicit intention of the video is to give credit and acknowledge the gaming skills of the player *ThatGoldenBullet12*, but the video begins by criticising the name of the player. *ThatGoldenBullet12'*s player skills are thereafter given little attention, which is also evident in the written comments below, which rather respond to the dialogue between the couple.

[3] The distinction between different types of hypertextuality as described by Genette (1997) will not be elaborated here due to lack of space, but Genette's distinction of the parody (the playful transformation) and the pastiche (the playful imitation) are relevant in relation to Mashups..

While contributing to an online community, most of the gaming commentary videos are also self-promotional and associated with competitive activities where the overall intention often seems to be a display of gaming skills. This is supported by the fact that the videos observed here only contain gaming videos with successful performances and impressive player scores (even though not all are recognised, e.g., *Taylor Tuesday…*). This indicates how viewers are favouring videos that demonstrate the best gaming skills and that people only make videos of their best games. The videos thereby integrate and reflect on a competitive activity that is also related to the aspects of recognition and self-promotion overtly linked to visibility and promotional strategies of the YouTube interface (cf. Simonsen 2011),

Mashup narratives

Another type of computer game Mashup is the Machinima (notice the difference between the "Machinima" channel and the genre!), a fictional narrative story deriving from a computer-mediated game. This understanding of a Machinima, as an independent narrative story told within the environment of an existing computer game, resembles a more traditional example of a creative work than, e.g., Gaming Commentaries. It emphasises aesthetic and especially narrative skills less than social skills. Machinimas are, as mentioned earlier, dictated by an existing environment and pre-defined characters within the fictional world of the computer game. Machinimas are therefore typically playful and yet still respectful imitations of the specific game culture they remediate. A difference between the gaming commentary videos and Machinimas is the role of the creators. While *Taylor Tuesday* (…) is a collective voice, most Machinimas are individual works relying on and referring to a shared fan-community, but nonetheless independent creative works.

One example of a more explicit independent creative work is *Team Fortress 2 – Law Abiding Engineer*. The video is an interesting demonstration of a Machinima Mashup that recombines the film medium with a computer game. The video imitates the trailer format, mixing already existing film footage from the original film trailer of the feature film *Law Abiding Citizen* with animated scenes inspired by the world of the computer game *Team Fortress 2.* The complete audio track, i.e., a voiceover, from the original trailer is maintained and in that sense the basic storyline does not change. But by integrating different characters, the video only makes complete sense if viewers are familiar with the computer game and the specific characters and their relationship in the game, which thereby provides new meaning to the narrative.

Some Mashups take on a caricatured approach, but this video seems somewhat neutral towards the original film, *Law Abiding Citizen*, although the creator, *TrueOneMoreUser*, in the text below the video, directly encourages his audience not to watch the original film. *Team Fortress 2 – Law Abiding Engineer* in that sense can be interpreted as a proposal on how to make the original film better by replacing the cast with a computer game cast, which most of the viewers in their comments below the video agree upon

Figure # 3: *Team Fortress 2 – Law abiding engineer*

And similar to other gaming Mashups, *Team Fortress 2 – Law Abiding Engineer* accordingly communicates within a fan community of games. However, in contrast to, e.g., gaming commentaries, *Team Fortress 2 – Law Abiding Engineer* does not call for community participation, but rather for skilful acknowledgement, as *TrueOneMoreUser* underlines by placing himself in the intro-credits as director and by declaring in the text below the video: "I proudly present my biggest animating/compositing project I ever did." The majority of comments are also accolades to the creator's visual and editing skills rather than comments relating to the universe of the game or the everyday reflections.

Mashups of popular culture

As described by Jenkins, fan produced content, such as the gaming Mashups, has grown from being primarily niche content towards a more popular stage, with the emergence of digital media and here concretely with the accessibility of YouTube. But in comparison with other Mashups in the sample, it is still niche content that is consumed and communicated within a rather closed community that somewhat separates the gaming Mashups from Mashups such as the *Bed Intruder Song* and other videos that reflect upon popular culture with looser social ties.

This includes Mashups found in the sample that derive from a widespread popular culture. These references account for film references (*160 Greatest Arnold Schwarzenegger Quotes* or *The 100 Greatest Movie Insults of All Time*), popular music Mashups (*"Overboard - Justin Bieber"* and *HOT K-POP 2010*), sports collages (*Press Hop 2*, *Gracias Raul!*) and animé and cartoons (*TFS Episode 14*). As mentioned earlier, this also includes Mashups that remix content deriving from the popular sphere of YouTube (*Bed Intruder Song* and *Double Rainbow Song*).

Many videos recombine a widespread popular culture that as mentioned earlier positions the videos as either with an ironic distance or with an acknowledgement of the original content. The predominant group of Mashups belongs to the latter, where many videos can be considered homages and celebrations of popular cultures. They also resemble the mundane of the bricolage style when collecting all available clips of pop-stars. This group includes videos such as *Justin Bieber Pray music video Eenie Meenie Love Me (...)*,and *¡Gracias, Raúl!*, Such videos are celebrations of stars from the larger sphere of popular culture. They can be regarded as audiovisual illustrations similar to a teenage bedroom with decorations of pop-stars, but they are now moving out of the bedroom and into the public space of YouTube (also see Burgess and Green 2009, p. 26).

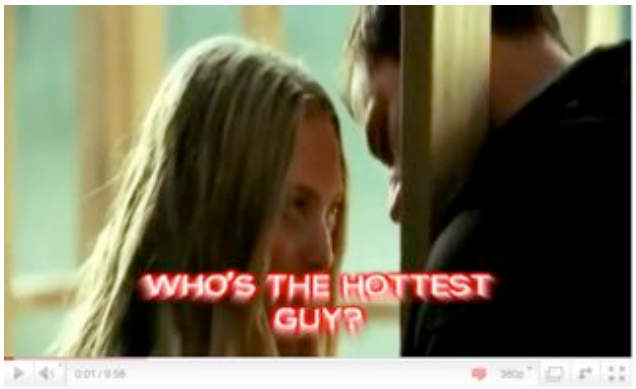


Figure # 4: *Justin Bieber Pray music video Eenie Meenie Love Me…*",

Justin Bieber Pray music video Eenie Meenie Love Me (...) is a musical collage reflecting on popular culture. It displays social intentionality by adding a text in the beginning of the video, asking: *Who's the hottest guy?* The video thereby invites other users to participate through commenting or video responding. The dialogic emphasis is furthermore underlined in the related text describing the video below, where users are asked: "*who is the hottie you like most! please tell me i curious! luvs!"*. The video is created within an undefined community of Justin Bieber fans who communicate and share knowledge about their idol by making videos referring to Bieber. Much like the gaming videos, the fan homages take active part in a fan community, although it is less homogenous and does not require specific mediated knowledge unlike the computer game Mashups, which makes it easier to access the community of popular culture in these fan-homages.

Justin Bieber Pray music video Eenie Meenie Love Me (...) illustrates how the Mashup can be used to generate participation from other users in terms of judgment, cultural taste and socialising contributions, where one aspect of making these videos seems to be to strengthen social bonds and responses among community members. The video does so by turning the everydayness of photos of teenage idols into a creative expression that people can gather around and engage with. It thereby is an illustration of the Vernacular Creativity, serving a communicative purpose through the sharing of popular culture. At the same time, the video is, however, also an individual creative expression showing the skills of combining pictures with music.

The Autotune

While these types of videos primarily are homages, the *Autotune*, as mentioned earlier, is a more distanced ironic form that mocks the already existing video. Autotunes emerged within popular music, and the technique is also being increasingly used on YouTube[4]. The technique of an Autotune involves a phase vocoder, which allows people to sing a perfect tune without the ability to actually sing or, as many YouTube Autotunes do, change normal speech into singing. Autotunes thereby makes it possible to mock and transform all statements into parodies. Through the use of Autotune, the creator can therefore easily signal a distance from the original clip. This is evident in Autotunes such as *Bed Intruder Song* and *Double Rainbow Song,* which are independent music numbers, but also ironic comments to the footage they are reflecting. Another example is the Mashup *Press Hop 2 - by DJ Steve Porter,* which recombines interviews of famous sports stars with

[4] Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auto-Tune.

Hip Hop music. The video is a sequel to a similar video mixing clips of NBA players. *Press Hop 2* represents a contrast to collaborative creativity by its individual artistic creation, that promote individuality rather than the social and shared collaborative. *Press Hop 2*, like *Justin Bieber Pray music (...)*, refers to a North American dominated popular culture. The difference is that like *Team Fortress 2 – Law Abiding Engineer*, *Press Hop 2* does not encourage users to interact, respond or collaborate, but instead signals one-way communication that promotes artistic editing and music skills within a commercial context.

In that sense, we have examples of different uses of the Mashup corresponding to how meaning is related to the double logic of remediation as "immediacy" through connectivity or the use of the connectivity to draw attention away from the community towards a more widespread audience in a commercial context. On the one hand, the Mashups referred to here serve a communicative and socialising purpose through referring to a shared mainstream community that can be explicitly collaborative (*Taylor Tuesday*…, *Justin Bieber*...) or more implicitly collaborative through intertextual references (*Team Fortress 2 – Law Abiding Engineer*, *Press Hop 2*). On the other hand, there is simultaneously an awareness of the community as a consuming audience leading to a pursuit of visibility, where subscriptions and viewings count beyond social purposes. For instance, in *Taylor Tuesday*... the creator of the video, beside social purposes also links to sponsors and encourages users to subscribe through screen tags.

The examples above also allow us to distinguish between how the remediations of computer games on YouTube function as both immediacy and hypermediacy. Immediacy is encouraged through the remediation of shared and collective commentaries taking place in the YouTube community, where YouTube as a media platform, through, e.g., folksonomies of tags and links, creates homogeneity in which information and meaning are exchanged flawlessly. Hypermediacy takes place in the potentiality of divergent meaning. Different levels of participation and consumption, and different modes of motivation for creating turn attention towards the fact that the new meaning Mashups provide is not necessarily connecting people in the same way, which is also the case in the Mashups recombining content for the more widespread popular culture of YouTube.

Disrupting meaning

What the Mashups nonetheless share is a fundamental playfulness that can be related to the awareness and fascination of YouTube as media platform. This is evident in the widespread integration of meta-data, where many of the Mashups explicitly integrate tags, comments, video responses or links as part of their overall expression. But it also illustrates an abandonment of the romanticised idea of the creative expression with solely aesthetic bias and complex narratives that have been superseded by technological affordances, which besides communicative purposes, signal a playfulness. There is throughout the sample a foregrounding of technologies rather than artistic skills. This also reflects a fascination with the available annotations (textual and graphic layers designed by YouTube), editing techniques and special effects; many of the Mashups apply these tools for expressing homages and humoristic reflections on the mainstream culture. The uniqueness of Mashups can therefore also be found in in the playful audiovisual transformation of a shared popular culture into everyday reflections.

This transformation does not serve the same function in all the Mashups examined here. There are different functions of the playfulness as, e.g., argued by Negus and Pickering (2004), who in regards to creativity state that there is a distance between content, which is playful adaptations of

popular culture like *Justin Bieber Pray music* and videos that play with the genre conventions, as in *Team Fortress 2 – Law Abiding Engineer*:

> The active participation in these revisions, and sometimes subtly realised qualities of newness, is quite different to the moment of innovation which is subsequently evaluated as a radical disruption of generic rules and expectations (ibid. 14).

In general, Mashups reflect playfulness and a fascination with technologies that can be described as a form of newness or novelty and less as a "radical disruption", although *Team Fortress 2 – Law Abiding Engineer* presents an ironic distance towards the original product, it is hardly a "disruption" of genre expectations. *Press Hop 2* makes an ironic comment on contemporary sports stars, but the critique is not specific or has any political or disruptive purpose.

Frederic Jameson has described post-modern culture as *blank parody* (1999, p. 17), in which parody has been replaced by pastiches, e.g., exemplified in nostalgic stylistics with no critical stance towards the objective. It could be tempting to use a similar label in relationship to Mashups that to a certain extent appear as harmless reproductions of popular culture, but this will be a disparagement of the importance of social value and meaning created inside the shared community. As argued earlier, the transformation of the folkloric and everydayness serve a social functionality in the YouTube community in which the Mashups are created and distributed. The Mashups must furthermore be understood in a demographic context, dominated by primarily young people under 25 (cf. the Axelis.com demographic statistics of the YouTube audience[5], who to a great extent consume YouTube content for entertainment purposes).

Conclusions

This article has investigated a small spectre of the Mashups on YouTube in terms of providing an understanding of how this type of audiovisual content serves as a specific mode of producing new meaning, social bonds as well as self-promotion. Mashups have been characterised as audiovisual texts that follow the principles of collage and bricolage, but they are also adjusted to the accessibility of YouTube, enabling the transformation of specific production of content towards content, gaining their success through social and communicative features. I have attempted to demonstrate that the YouTube Mashup ranges from different approaches and understandings of YouTube that may share the foundation of a social community fostering co-creativity and collaboration, but accordingly with YouTube's gradual transformation into a commercially defined media platform, the premises for production are equally changing, making the collective creative voices into potential commodities. The Mashup must therefore be understood as inevitably enrolled in this context. Mashups may furthermore articulate a user-defined collaborative community, but at the same time the collaborative coexists with aspiring artistic expressions that are founded in the fundamental act of self-promotion.

The article has furthermore applied Grusin's revision of remediation towards a distinction between the logic of immediacy, as connectivity within the YouTube community, and hypermediacy, as a description of the divergence and multi-functionality of this connectivity. These terms have proven useful for understanding the nuances of the Vernacular Creativity as well as to exemplify the relevance of this double-logic in regards to specific examples of Mashups, such as the gaming Mashups that are remediations of computer-games and per se hypermediated, but through

[5] See: http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/youtube.com. Retrieved, May 2, 2011.

accessibility and their correspondence to an established connected and shared community they also follow the logic of immediacy. In conclusion, this article has tried to demonstrate that the novelty and originality of the YouTube Mashup is not to be found in its formal or aesthetic characteristic, despite its obvious playfulness and fascination with YouTube annotations. It should rather be found in its ability to turn the ordinary everydayness into social and cultural value consumed and promoted within the YouTube community.

References:

Bolter, J. D. and R. Grusin (1999). *Remediation, Understanding new media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Burges, J. (2007). *Vernacular Creativity and New Media*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Queensland University of Technology,

Burgess, J. and J. Green (2009). *YouTube, Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Diakopolus, N.et al. (2007). Remixing Authorship. Georgia Institute of Technology.

Genette, G. (1997). *Palimpsests, Literature in the Second Degree*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Grusin, R. (2009). YouTube at the End of New Media**.** In P. Snickars & P. Vonderau (Eds.) *The YouTube Reader* (pp.60-67). Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

Hawkes, T. (2003/1977). *Structuralism and Semiotics*. London: Routledge.

Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: Meaning of Style.* London: Routledge.

Jameson, F. (1999/1991) *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture*, New York: N.Y. University Press.

Keen, A. (2007). *The Cult of the amateur*. New York: Doubleday.

Leví-Strauss, C. (1966): *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Michelson, A. (1984): *Kino-eye: the writings of Dziga Vertov*. Berkely: University of California Press.

Miller, P.D. *et al* (2008) *Sound unbound, Sampling digital music and Culture*. Cambridge Masachusetts: the MIT Press.

Negus, K. and M. Pickering (2004) *Creativity, Communication and Cultural Value*. London: Sage Publications.

Simonsen, T. M. (2011) Categorizing YouTube. In *MedieKultur* Vol. 28, No. 51.

Strangelove, M. (2010) *Watching YouTube*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Tapscott, D. (2009) *Grown up Digital*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Uricchio, W (2009) The Future of a Medium Once Known as Television. In P. Snickars & P. Vonderau (Eds.) *The YouTube Reader* (pp.24-39). Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

Written By
Thomas Mosebo Simonsen
Aalborg University
Department of Communication.

.....

Presentations of the self on YouTube

Written by: Thomas Mosebo Simonsen
Aalborg University

Abstract

This article provides an introduction to the YouTube Vlog in a historical context and how it is specifically identified on YouTube. The article investigates the YouTube Vlog in regards to the notion of authenticity as an important feature of the Vlog that furthermore is identified as a performance. The article also investigates the Vlogs as an example of the home mode culture e.g. presented and how YouTube as a medium platform inflicts and changes the concept of the home mode as well as how it is distributed, this also includes a discussion of YouTube's commercial influence on the characteristic of the Vlog. It moreover involves a discussion of how users navigate throughout the content on YouTube and e.g. how they identify a hoax, and identify a Vlog as authentic.
The article investigates the YouTube Vlog by involving several case studies of Vlogs found among the most popular content on YouTube.

Introduction

Visibility is an essential factor on YouTube. Like politicians, YouTube celebrities and rising stars are relying on media in order to present themselves in the public space. This is of course not a new phenomenon. We see this across different media platforms in which ordinary people without any particular talent other than being obnoxious are momentarily able to become celebrities. From the emerging reality culture in the 1980s, a celebrity culture of ordinary people has arisen (Dovey 2000) and is accentuated with the unlimited access and boundless distribution forms on YouTube (cf. Turner 2010). YouTube's lack of experts and institutional regulations has nevertheless created a media platform for unfiltered visibility that any audiovisual culture has not yet experienced to a similar extent; but it has also resulted in a fuzzy border between social identify and self-promotion, changing the perception of how we regard representations of the self.

For one thing, there is much competition for this visibility on YouTube that also inflicts upon the social behaviour within user generated content (UGC) on the site (cf. Strangelove 2010). Many of the popular and most promoted stars of YouTube seem to have adopted a way to communicate on YouTube that involves various forms of making themselves visible. One of the most predominant forms of communication is the first-person video, in which subjects present themselves or appear as self-constituted hosts to their own personal videos. Central to these videos are presentations or more specifically, presentations of the self. Audiovisual self-presentations can be considered an increasing mode for ordinary people to create an online identity (cf. Molyneaux *et al* 2008, p.2). On YouTube, a great deal of content can be regarded as presentations of the self, reflecting mediated everyday situations and social behaviour. Videos are to some extent adaptations and remediations of already existing content, but the content of YouTube is simultaneously framed and created within the medium specific context of YouTube. This makes it somewhat different from the already existing content, distinguished by the influence of technological properties, YouTube's structural organisation and its specific agency. These contexts all influence what I refer to as an accentuating visibility culture of YouTube in which first-person mediations are essential.

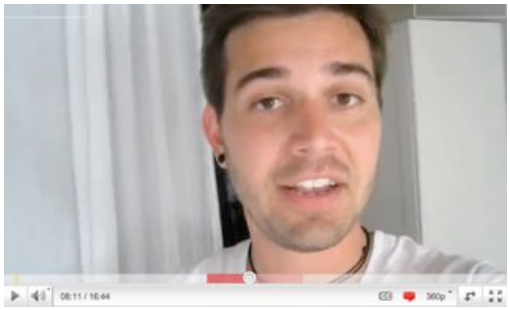
From this starting point, the current article seeks to identify what characterises the most popular form of audiovisual self-representation on YouTube and thereby how people use audiovisuality in order to present themselves on YouTube. This is examined through an analytical focus on the most dominant form of self-representation on YouTube, the so-called "Video blogs" or "Vlogs". Vlogs are online, public self-representations. The article seeks to identity what characterises the Vlogs on YouTube in regards to the public presentation of the self, the Vlog's aesthetic characteristics as well as its communicative contexts. The article argues that one central issue when identifying the Vlog is the concept of authenticity. The article therefore further investigates the role of authenticity in regards to the Vlog.

The Vlogs are discussed using a brief, history of media perspective, incorporating a spectre of different theories of documentaries, home movies and reality television. The article supports its arguments by including selected case studies of Vlogs that can be found among the most popular content of YouTube (that is, videos officially nominated by YouTube on their lists of most promoted content on YouTube, deriving from the most viewed, discussed and subscribed videos).

Identifying the Vlog

Etymologically, the term Vlog derives from the textual blog and is short for *Video Blogging* (cf. Miles 2003). A Vlog is a personal blog mediated through audiovisual communication. The predominant media platform is the Internet, and Vlogs are currently most commonly found on YouTube. The Vlog can be regarded as an audiovisual self-image. It is a film or a video created by a subject, who is also physically present in the video. The dominating aesthetic is a first-person camera to which the creator communicates directly. The most common camera position of the Vlog is an arm's-length positioned camera that is "turned on oneself" (cf. Luers 2007, p. 6) or simply from the built-in web-cam on the computer.

Frame grab: The Vlogger *Shaytards* (in front of a mirror)



Frame grab: *CTFxC*: "Vlog point of view"

There are moreover many examples of the Vlogger using the first-person camera as a visual introduction to present her or himself and then turns the camera towards the surroundings, taking on a position similar to that of the camera in the documentary observational form. Most Vlogs are representations of reality, and thus texts of non-fiction. They depict everyday behaviour and social activities among people situated in a historical reality. But as will be elaborated, it is also a highly subjective and somewhat staged version of reality.

Before the widespread use of the Internet, BBC's successful *Video Nation* from 1992 was an early example of video blogging, often referred to as "Video diaries" (cf. Henderson 2009). In the 1990s, the term *Digital Storytelling* emerged as a Berkeley-based study approach for creating audiovisual

personal narratives (cf. Lambert 2010). Digital Storytelling has also been defined more broadly by Nick Couldry as "the whole range of personal stories now being told in potentially public form using digital media resources" (2008, p. 42). This understanding of digital storytelling complies for some Vlogs found in smaller social networks on YouTube as well, but the type of digital storytelling referred to by Couldry and Lambert is different from the majority of popular Vlogs on YouTube. Digital Storytelling is explicitly concerned with using the media as a tool or method to make meaning through true personal stories (cf. Lambert 2010, p. 5). But digital storytelling furthermore includes an explicit focus on developing stories that often involve a tone of seriousness and didactic reflections of the private and intimate. This type of self-presentation can also be found on YouTube, but the most popular Vlogs have a more immediate profile and rather than functioning as a method of self-processing, the Vlogs are first and foremost consumed in a context of entertainment.

The digital storytelling term is perhaps more appropriate for the early forms of Vlogs. One of the early significant examples of online Vlogging is the *Yahoo Video Blogging Group* formed in 2005[1]. The group later published *The Lumiere Manifesto*[2], in which they added a more lyrical dimension and overt artistic ambitions with ascetic dogmatism (max. length of 60 seconds, no edit, no effects etc.). It is a parallel type of Vlog that Miles (2003), Luers (2007) as well as Warmbrodt *et al* (2008) refer to in their description of the Vlog. These Vlogs have explicit artistic ambitions in terms of aesthetics, which is not the case among the most popular Vlogs on YouTube, which are not concerned to a similar extent with the aesthetics as are the videos within the *Lumiere Manifesto*. This can be illustrated by frame grabs from two Vlogs from the *Yahoo Video Blogging Group*:

Frame grab: *Watching Pippiolotti*

Frame grab: *Smoke Window*

These examples contain a more outspoken lyrical and artistic awareness with less focus on the presentation of the self, and in that sense are far from the videos coined as Vlogs on YouTube. Miles characterised the Vlog (using the term "Vog") as user-interactive: "A vog is interactive in that the user has to do something, and this something affects in a literal way the work itself" (2003, p. 230). This is an element which is still noticeable in a lot of the Vlogs found on YouTube today as well. Although the Vlog often involves direct user-interaction, i.e., competitions, encouragement for subscribing or thematic issues that users are asked to comment on, the level of interaction on YouTube has more nuances than the earlier Vlog forms described by Miles, Luers and Warmbrodt et al. Vlogs in most cases are made by individuals and not by co-creating authors, like for example on Wikipedia. Aesthetics or narratives are rarely discussed and besides the acknowledgement of

[1]Cf. blog posted by Heather Green (2005): http://www.businessweek.com/the_thread/blogspotting/archives/2005/08/those_darn_vide.html?campaign_id=rss_blog_blogspotting.
[2] See http://videoblogging.info/.

viewers in the videos, the Vlogger does not respond, in most cases, to the comments or video-responses produced by viewers as part of a social network.

Miles Luers, and Warmbrodt et al. exemplify their analyses of the Vlogs by referring to websites such as *Mefeedia.com*, *Blip.tv* or *VlogDIR.com* (now closed). These sites, compared to YouTube, generate noticeably fewer views. They were to a larger extent functioning as social networks in which the focus was primarily on artistic and aesthetic expressions. Now the sites have changed; *Mefeedia* has officially many commercial partners[3] and *Blip.tv* has made a "strategic partnership" with some of the most popular YouTubers[4]. There are still more serious and less commercial sites such as *Current TV* and *Vimeo*, in which more traditional Vlogs can be found, but the type of Vlog that dominates YouTube is somewhat different and quite distinct from the intentions stated in "The Lumiere Manifesto".

Molyneaux et al. define the Vlogs on YouTube rather broadly as "a form of online publishing" and see many parallels to the personal blog (2008, p. 2). Likewise, Burgess and Green observe many antecedent characteristics of the Vlog in "webcam cultures, personal blogging and confessional culture" (2009, p. 53). They moreover stress the significance of its social aspects in turns of immediacy:

> The Vlog reminds us of the residual character of interpersonal face-to-face communication and provides an important point of difference between online video and television (…) it is a form whose persistent direct address to the viewer inherently invites feedback (ibid., p. 54).

This is revealed in user participation through video responding and commenting. Nevertheless, as Jose Van Dijck also argues, participation is far from the dominant way of consuming content that in most cases can be characterised as regular streaming (2009, p. 44). The Vlog does enable a unique situation of a "here and now" and a direct address of creators that may invite feedback, but the difference between television and YouTube is just as much exemplified by YouTube's VOD structure and user-accessibility that implement more direct contact with the creator of the video and thereby a sense of immediacy.

Finally, Michael Strangelove also touches upon the Vlogs in his volume *Watching YouTube* (2010). He regards them as video diaries and is especially interested in their confessional attributes. But he also emphasises an interesting aspect that differentiates the Vlogs from the traditional video diary. Besides a widespread level of interaction, he distinguishes them by "their high degree of reflexivity" (2010, p. 73). Many Vlogs add a meta-commentary layer by commenting on their own role as Vloggers and integrate "behind the scene" footage of how the video was made. In that sense, the Vlog becomes a double representation of the self and of what Strangelove characterises as "self-monitoring media practices" (ibid., p. 75). The Vlog can therefore also be characterised as self-reflexive, in that the creator can take on various roles in presenting the self, wherein certain roles can foster certain impressions of authenticity. Videos sometimes involve a performative, more staged subject, while at the same time, presenting, e.g., through self-reflexivity a more private or behind-the-scene version, as I shall return to in the following section. In regards to social networking, Knut Lundby, quoting Sonia Livingstone, touches upon a similar differentiation between the different modes of presenting a subject, as the "I" and the "me":

[3] See http://www.mefeedia.com/about .
[4] See www.blip.tv.

> Social networking is about 'me' in the sense that I reveal the self-embedded in the peer group, as known to and represented by other, rather than the private 'I' known best by oneself (ibid., p. 5).

Although related to social networking, this distinction is relevant to how we can regard self-presentations on YouTube as well. What we see on YouTube is a presentation of the "me" that is mediated (framed, edited and distributed on YouTube) and is therefore biased. At the same time, there is a more private subject, I, existing in the referential reality that simultaneously is being represented. Livingstone further addresses George Herbert Mead, who has also touched upon a distinction between the "Me" and the "I" which also involves a focus on how presenters are addressing an audience (1934, pp. 173).

Medium properties

Studies of identity formation in online blogs have been conducted by both Herring et al (2005), who underline the importance of technical affordances of blog software, and Huffaker *et al* (2005), who also argue that medium specific properties have an influence on the construction of online identities. YouTube can be examined from a similar perspective. There are several noticeable features of the media platform's influence. Firstly, the accessibility of YouTube has contributed to the widespread use of UGC through its VOD structure and linking flow, where everybody with Internet access and a camera can be a creator. The linking structure also provides users with a navigational tool that makes identification and creation of meaning between different channels easier than on other media platforms.

Secondly, the embedding of meta-data, i.e., annotations, tags and comment writing, allows creators to integrate emotional or personal comments in the video and in that way add layers to the videos which can be considered small acts of self-presentation. Many videos also use annotations[5] and signs as informative layers that help explain what is going on.

Thirdly, the visibility and popularity of UGC is also related to the emergence of new technology, i.e., camera-phones and cheap portable cameras that had a huge impact on ordinary users' possibilities of producing videos to an extent not seen before in terms of mobility as well as frequency. Finally, UGC can embed idiosyncratic tags and textual layers that also function as commercials and encourage users to subscribe. The medium properties in that sense contribute to presenting the video in a competitive environment, which furthermore situates the creators as commercial producers and thereby affects the mode of self-representation.

The annotations and text layers moreover facilitate a self-reflexive mode of communication, as the example with *BrittaniLouiseTaylor* also indicates. By adding these layers, it draws attention towards the role as a creator of UGC. Many videos furthermore contain reflexive and self-ironic comments in reference to the role as a creator, as expressed in the Vlogger *Shaytard's* encouragement (in the text) to his viewers to give his video a good rating in the intro-sequence to his series:

[5] Annotation is an editorial tool that allows users to integrate signs and text layers, e.g., in the form of pop-up speech bubbles. Annotations are both graphical and textual layers added to the videos after being uploaded.

Frame Grab: *The Shaytards: BIRTHDAY FOR A PRINCESS!*

Visual redundancy

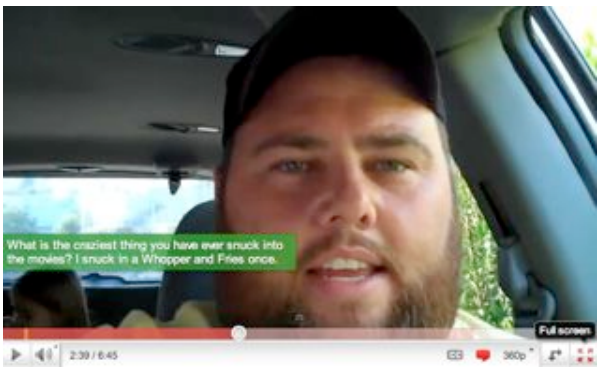
The predominance of the first-person camera results in a somewhat simple and static cinematic style with the focus on the subject. With the self-image in focus, standard framing is generally absent. This leads to a certain type of style that most frequently has been referred to as "amateur-style" (cf. Burgess and Green 2009, Strangelove 2010). The YouTube Vlog in regards to aesthetics is less serious in terms of artistic ambitious than the Vlogs described by Miles (2003) and Luers (2007). This must also be seen as a result of an ongoing media specific development as well as an increasing commercialisation of YouTube.

Another noticeable difference is that the Vlogs on YouTube are made at a different frequency. On YouTube, most Vloggers produce many videos a week and some two at day. A final explanation is the increased broadband speeds of the Internet. YouTube in regards to this development has gradually changed the constraints of the format in terms of length. Many Vlogs are now around 12-15 min and some up to 20 minutes, in comparison to the earlier formats with a maximum 5 min running time (Luers 2007, p. 5). Both the increased amount of material produced on YouTube and the increased length leave even less time for an emphasis on the postproduction phase or the development of social characters and plots, which do not seem to be of much importance in the YouTube Vlogs.

Similar to Richard Chalfen's characteristic of home videos in *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987), the Vlogs can be characterised as visually redundant (pp. 72). This means very few of the Vlogs entail a narrative or a story told via images. They are not conscious about visuality in comparison to the early Vlogs or in digital storytelling. Rather, the Vlogger orientates the audience through direct oral communication. Meaning is created in terms of direct speech towards the camera that informs the spectator regarding what is going on, while images serve as supporting illustrations of this. Occasionally meaning is also created through the integrated signs and texts or through an edited voiceover.

With reference to radio and television, Walter Ong characterises the re-integration of primary oral cultures into electronic media as "Secondary Orality" (1982, p. 135). In regards to YouTube, it is noticeable how orality has been reinforced as a way of creating meaning by *telling* the audience what is going on instead of *showing* them. This can be exemplified by the large number of informal communications embedded in the videos. Furthermore, as argued by Lange (2009) and Hartley

(2009), a great deal of phatic communication takes place around UGC. Through this communication mode, the video's existence is extended into the user comments below the video, in which topics and issues from the content are frequently discussed. Although textual, the comments are characterised by a situational informality and subjectivity, which also characterises the oral culture (cf. Ong 1982, p. 136). This for example can help explain the popularity of the Vlogger Shay, from the Vlog *The Shaytards*, who films the everyday life of himself and his family. Besides a small animated and well edited intro-sequence, the videos have no narrative, visual or technical qualities compared to conventional media productions, but *The Shaytards* is on the top 20-list of the most subscribed YouTubers of all time and his channel has more than 66 million views, which indicates something else is at stake. In the video *Funny People,* Shay asks his viewers both via an annotation (see frame grab below) but also orally: "Do any of you not sneak candy into feature, because you think it is dishonest?" (2:39)



Frame grab: *Shaytards: Funny People*

When Shay explicitly encourages his audience to comment on what food you can bring to a cinema, it serves a function that can be characterised as a type of phatic communication in the sense that the viewers react by responding with utterances that prolong the existence of the video and enable the possibility for socialising. For example, the following two viewers respond to what to bring into the cinema: "i snuck 40oz of Steel reserve, and a Tall can of ice house to go watch xmen 2. it was awkward seeing ppl stare at me lol. but that was 6 years ago lol"; or as another writes, "at my AMC you can bring in outside food". In these comments, viewers are not only responding to the videos, they also share their experiences with other viewers and are building social ties with other viewers. In that sense, interacting and communicating through comments also mirrors their own experiences and everyday lives. This indicates how the video for some viewers provides an incitement to participate in everyday small-talk communication. But with only 1.3%[6] of the viewers commenting on this specific video, user-interaction through comment writing far from explains the video's success (although we do not know the number of viewers, who just read the comments without posting).

Home movie heritage

Together with the video diary, the home movie is probably the most relevant antecedent parallel to the Vlog. The home movie, however, is normally identified by the creator's position behind the camera rather than first-person camera, and the home movie in many examples has a different

[6] This percentage reflects the number of comments (2,188) divided by the total number of views (165,000).

communicative purpose. But a comparison between the home movie and the Vlog is nonetheless relevant. Richard Chalfen made an extensive investigation on family photography and home movies. According to Chalfen, what characterises the home movie mode is the private and personal reflection on everyday life, including holidays, domestic happenings, family activities etc. They are above all joyful videos where negative aspects of everyday life are excluded, and in that way they represent a specific framed version of reality:

> Home movies do not record the reality of everyday life. Instead we find a carefully selected repertory of highlighted times and occurrences that a family is likely to celebrate and wish to remember (1987, p. 64).

According to Chalfen, the home movie is therefore a selection of ritual hedonistic behaviour. This is also the case with the most popular YouTube content. The topics and situations that the Vlogs depict thus have more in common with home movies than with video diaries that often use the video as a tool for processing sad and tragic moments (cf. ibid, p. 134, Jo Henderson 2009, p. 156). There is of course a great deal of content that is concerned with sad and negative issues, but these are not widespread in the videos that are among the most popular content. These issues are more frequently communicated in private forums (since it is possible to decide if the video is public for everyone when uploading). There are exceptions, like the YouTube celebrity *Chris Crooker*, who became famous because of his video *Leave Britney alone*, which at the time of writing had around 39 million views. It has gained great popularity due to Crooker's emotional and strongly performative outburst. It especially seems to be the latter that viewers respond to (in the comments below the video) and it is being consumed as a sensationalistic performance, which Crooker himself has also categorised as entertainment. YouTube is generally a site of entertainment, which reflects the most popular content dominated by videos of funny, parodic, creative and above all entertaining situations. A lot of the most popular UGC resembles television programmes such as "*America's funniest home videos*". Similar to this show, cats and funny babies have also invaded YouTube. The Vlogs also seems to be influenced by the need to entertain and thereby gain visibility. This can also be regarded as a direct consequence of the commercial influence on YouTube.

Vlogs in a commercial context

When we discuss the Vlogs on YouTube, one overall aspect is commercialisation, as briefly referred to in the introduction of this article. An essential consequence of this is the increasing transformation of the so-called amateur into a professional media producer, adapting to the commercial demands and competitive environment of YouTube (cf. Strangelove 2010). Many of the self-presentations on YouTube must be thought of as produced in a commercial and competitive environment, where we should not think of the presenter as an amateur, but rather in a professional context, an enhancement of what Leadbeater and Miller have coined "Pro-am" (straightforwardly: "*amateurs who work to professional standards*", 2004, p. 12). But in contrast to the Pro-ams, many YouTubers are being paid for making videos and Vlogging has become both an identity and a full-time profession. This aspect is reinforced by the increasing commercialisation of YouTube, where amateur culture has been integrated by different commercial strategies, including: 1) commercials since 2007 have been embedded in most content, 2) YouTube has initiated a partner programme in which ordinary users, juxtaposed with established media producers, are being paid for producing videos and product placement, 3) YouTubers and companies can buy themselves promotion and thereby visibility. Altogether this results in a hierarchical and competitive interface structure that challenges the idea of YouTube as a non-market orientated site of user-democracy. In this context, the identity of a Vlogger must be regarded just as much as an adoption of Vlogging as an explicit

profession that involves certain performative standardised norms of behaving, pointing at an increased mediated awareness of the role as a Vlogger and an awareness of a public audience.

The home movie according to Chalfen is a provider of memories and joyful family rituals, i.e., Christmas, weddings, graduations etc., that usually demand specific knowledge of the people appearing in the movie. The audience of home movies therefore normally only includes family members or friends, who view the film together with the creator. This is not the case with YouTube. The potential audience is the entire Internet and the most popular Vlogs have hundreds of thousands and some even millions of views. Henry Jenkins states in regards to fan fiction and fan movies that amateur filmmaking is no longer private, but (provided by the Internet) it has moved into public space (2006, p. 142). On YouTube, this transformation of amateur filmmaking has also changed how the creators address their audiences, as well as the form and content of the videos they create are influenced by the awareness of this public audience.

The Vlogger as a performer

Compared to Chalfen's description of the "home video mode" (1987, pp. 49), it can be noted that the creator of the video in regards to the revised status of the audience as public, accordingly has changed his or her role from being a neutral commentator and observing narrator into a performing subject. The performing subject moreover needs to be entertaining in terms of attracting an audience, while the home video serves the purpose of confirming family bonds through memories. According to Chalfen, memories hence served the purpose of documenting "a view of the way things were" (1987, p. 133). On YouTube, the creator of the Vlog instead adopts an explicit identity as a host or a Vlogger, somewhat in a social role as an entertainer. This results in a certain type of behaviour in front of the camera. In order to draw the attention of an audience, the Vlogger needs to be more than just a neutral observer of family members, holidays and family dinners – he or she needs to be an entertainer. We can therefore regard the Vlogger as a specific subjective mode of presentation analogous to an act of a performance. It is not possible to provide a full understanding of the term here, but overall, performativity can be understood in terms of culturally and socially coded behaviour, closely related to the sociological use of the term suggested by Erving Goffman (1990/1959). Further, as proposed by Marvin Carlson, a performance is always "a performance *for* someone" (1996, p. 6) [Italics in original]. This makes a performance an act that is being evaluated by an audience and therefore also involving an element of visibility. In the YouTube Vlog, it is not enough to discuss your private issues or show your family eating dinner from an observational point of view like in the home movie. The family needs to perform in front of the camera. Personal issues are performed, i.e., contextualised by self-irony, witty comments as well as intertextual references.

Another explanation for this focus on the subject and its performative behaviour is the increasing frequency and quantity of UGC productions that have created a natural need for including all everyday situations and common behaviour like picking up a pizza, shopping in the supermarket, standing in a queue or other mundane situations, as well as the filming of domestic settings such as bedrooms, restrooms and kitchens, which are not likely to be included in the classic home movie. In most cases these activities are not dramatic or entertaining per se. In order to stay promoted and visible, the creator must therefore turn these activities into actions of public interest to YouTube. This has contributed to a staged and performative depiction of everyday situations. A good example is *The Shaytards*. *The Shaytards* are excellent at transforming their behaviour and everydayness into entertaining performances, which can also provide an explanation for the series' success. It is significant how the family members constantly exhibit small gestures and facial expressions when the camera turns towards them. There is a good illustration of this in the video "*I throw da babies*";

the family is at a restaurant and the mother has to go to the toilet. She is standing quietly in the queue, but when she sees the camera, she almost automatically bursts into dancing (03:40).

In general, the actions of the characters in this series exemplify what John Thompson has referred to as "simulated everyday activity" that occurs for instance when people adapt their behaviour for the purpose of being filmed (1995, p. 102). There are many examples of how social behaviour within the content seems clearly affected by the creator's consciousness of having a performative role as an entertainer or a professional Vlogger who is always in need of presenting to a public audience. This is evident in the self-ironic stance that *The Shaytards* frequently take in his videos. For example, as above, in the video, ironically he says to his son: "Quit dragging attention on the video".

An example of the explicit adoptation of the role as a Vlogger can also be found in the videos of *CTFxC*. This is a Vlog in which we follow the everyday life of a couple. In one particular video, *JAMAICAN ME CRAZY*, they have travelled to Jamaica. The video has many similarities to the classic "Holiday movie", although mixing first-person camera and point of view hand-held camera. This is also how Charlie is self-reflexive in his role as a Vlogger, when he says: "Look at this guys, this is dedication! We have travelled all the way to Jamaica and after 30 minutes, I am like, Alli! We have to upload the Vlog (…) Cause I already know it's late, I am sorry!" (06:02).

Frame grabs: *CTFxC: JAMAICAN ME CRAZY!*

At the end of the video, Charlie films a woman at the hotel, who slides towards the camera giving it a "high five" while commenting on how to end the Vlog (16:24). This exemplifies how the interaction with other people is influenced by the presence of the camera and how outsiders almost automatically perform in front of it. It also shows a transformation of the traditional holiday home movie, where the camera normally does not focus on unknown people nor involve them as social characters (Cf. Chalfen 1987, p. 59). In contrast, this happens frequently in YouTube Vlogs. As is shown in *CTFxC*, the Vlogger repeatedly turns the camera away from her or himself and starts filming the surroundings in which other people are taking part. In comparison to e.g. traditional holiday home movies, there seems to be a general acceptance of being filmed, especially among young people, which is also the case with what seems to be another tourist that appears in the hotel lobby, when she adopts a performative role, adjusting her behaviour to the presence of the camera.

This emergence of performative behaviour is not a unique characteristic of YouTube, but a phenomenon that can be considered a basic cultural form of human behaviour in specific everyday situations. With a focus on tendencies in audiovisual communication, a good example are the documentary films of Michael Moore, who since the late 1980s has presented a subjective version

of reality, which has also been referred to as performative representations of reality (cf. Bruzzi 2001, Ward 2005). There are also many parallels to reality television in which ordinary people show certain adapted forms of behaviour altered by the presence of the camera. Aspects of specific forms of behaviour, private and public, were already touched upon in regards to social role-playing by Erving Goffman (1990/1959) and later in a mediated context by Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) and have been used to discuss reality television as examples of how privacy has become public property. Other researchers like Jon Dovey (2000) and Richard Kilborn (2003) have pointed out that reality television is concerned with performances of the drama in the everyday lives of ordinary people. Reality television also foregrounds conflicts, accidents and strong emotional behaviour that without the presence of the camera is something we would not likely be invited to see. This type of "staged everyday drama", however, is not significant to the Vlogs on YouTube. An overall difference is that the creators of Vlogs (like in the home movie) are in control. The Vlogs are filmed and edited by the creators and they therefore have the ability to leave out certain personal issues, confrontations as well as negative emotions. This is evident in many Vlogs, where the creator decides something is private and therefore turns off the camera. A good example is the video *Umbrellas Amuse Me: Observations from One Day in Munich* made by *Vlogbrothers*. In this video, the Vlogger has added a voiceover that explains what we are watching. On one occasion he goes into a church, but the camera stays outside, while he explains: "*I went inside to light a candle for a friend of mine who is sick. But I didn't film that because it felt private*" (1:52). Such a scene would most likely have been filmed if the creator had not been in control. In that sense the framing of the video characterises the Vlog as an expression of mediated but also a highly controlled presentation of the Vlogger's version of reality that furthermore is overtly self-reflexive, as also illustrated with the examples of both *The Shaytards* and Charles in *CTFxC*. The Vlogs therefore rarely contain strong emotional outbursts or reveal lack of control.

Authenticity

Quoting Michael Welsch, Michael Strangelove states: "if you could name a core value on YouTube it's authenticity. The strongest critique is to say that you're hiding behind something or you're not being real" (2010, p. 64). This is not exclusively a characteristic of UGC, but a phenomenon that many aspects of our culture seem concerned with, e.g., in regards to the credibility of politicians (cf. Thompson 1995). Additionally, Gilmore and Pine, in regards to "experience economy", argue that as a response to an altered and commercial everyday, consumers tend to emphasise authenticity as a way of "conforming to self-image" (2007, p. 6). This also seems to be somewhat the paradoxical case for YouTube. It can be illustrated by the Vlogs that despite being characterised as a mediated version of the self and saturated by the subject's specific perspective on the world, they simultaneously articulate a strong sense of authenticity. Strangelove goes even further, when he argues that authenticity is the main reason for the site's transformation into a mass medium:

> YouTube's rapid transformation into a mass medium is partially explained by the perception that amateur video offers something that television does not. That something is often described as more real (2010, p. 65).

Luers mentions that one significant feature of the Vlog is its non-fictional characteristic: "the majority of video blogs remain committed to the recording of the real world" (2007, p. 3). However, this is not an ontological understanding of the real world as objective or 100% truthful, but rather an *impression* of authenticity based on common agreement that a Vlog is a subjective and performative presentation, grounded in the ability to provide the impression of authenticity. Phillip Auslander has touched upon some of these elements in his analysis of the relationship between live

music performances and recorded, mediated music performances. He argues that the predominance of mediated music performances (music videos) has gradually replaced the sense of authenticity characterised by live music performances:

> Under the traditional schema, live performance authenticated the record, and performance on television was deemed intrinsically inauthentic (…) Now, the music video occupies the place formerly held by the sound recording as the primary musical text and has usurped live performance's authenticating function (…) thus making the video the standard for what is "real" in this performative realm (1999, p. 93).

Auslander differentiates between two comparative representations of musical performances (the live and the mediated), but his overall example cannot be compared to YouTube since there exists no staged live performance of the Vlog, but simply the mediated representation. But Auslander's overall point, that the impression of authenticity is mediated and influenced by the increasing interaction and consumption of media, is very relevant in regards to YouTube. The videos on YouTube possess the ability to provide a strong impression of authenticity because the idea of authenticity has itself gradually been mediated, in which everyday non-mediated behaviour is increasingly merging with mediated behaviour, i.e., the increasing use of mediated face-to-face communication through Facebook, MSN or YouTube. This then can be regarded as authentic in a similar way as a physical interaction (also see Thompson 2005, p. 35, Bruhn Jensen 2010, p. 65), where we to a certain extent can consider audiovisual communication as an established form of communication juxtaposed with face-to-face interaction (also see Hjarvad 2002, p. 229). Although Auslander tends to see mediated performances as pure simulation, not far from Baudrillard's idea of simulacra (1999, p. 93), the understanding of authenticity in regards to YouTube on the contrary is characterised by its referential status.

As stated earlier, self-reflexivity in many was is an embedded characteristic of the YouTube Vlogs. Through this self-reflexive perspective, the audience consequently becomes aware of the mediated situation, and when the Vlogger comments on the role as a Vlogger and reveals how it is being recorded, it naturally draws attention to the construction of the filmic process. This could seem paradoxical to the direct and intimate communication delivered by the first-camera position, but it is perhaps also a reflection of an underlying experience-based media awareness, which is embedded in the dominant demographic group of YouTube consumers[7]. This group, furthermore, can be referred to as "The Net Generation", as coined by Don Tapscott, who states: "Technology has been completely transparent to the Net Gen" (2009, p. 19). According to Tapscott, the involvement of reflexivity in terms of revealing technological methods has become naturalised and would therefore not seem to influence the impression of authenticity. On the contrary, the reflexive dimension communicates transparency.

Even though the involvement of production methods does not seem to influence the impression of authenticity, the Vlogs use standardised codes of amateur aesthetics and a home-movie style that according to Jon Dovey provide a strong sense of authenticity (2000, p.127). This is also a noticeable tendency for established television stations that increasingly use amateur-footage, e.g., mobile cameras, as documentation for authenticity. The first-person camera in the Vlog provides the impression of intimate involvement of the spectator, i.e., addressing the viewer with more direct contact in relation to the creator (cf. Nichols 1991, p. 54). This is also similar to the monologue-based communication form of traditional news hosts on television, but the Vlogs accordingly involve the use of the personal pronoun "You", which anchors a more immediate contact between

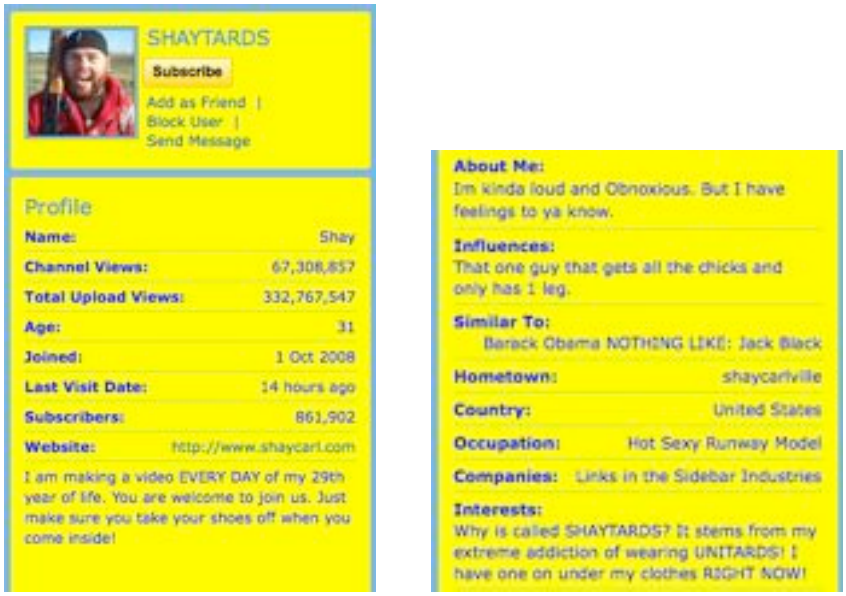
[7] According to Alexa.com, the dominating audience is 18-24 year olds (cf. http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/youtube.com#).

the creator and the spectator. Although the first-person camera along with domestic settings and personal reflections give the spectator the impression of authenticity, this argument is ultimately questionable since the impression of authenticity does not solely depend on form and style, but just as much on the reception.

The physical presence of the Vlogger

Earlier it was stressed that a great deal of focus is on an oral form of communication, while the videos primarily use images as informative illustrations. The images, however, serve an important function in regards to authenticity. The visual presentation provides a physically situated subject that is somewhat different from the blog and similar forms of online representations.

Sherry Turkle's (1995) ethnographic analysis of MUD identities is one of the first notable investigations of online identities and the creation of social communities on the Internet. The representations that Turkle discusses are avatars and virtually designed worlds that have no explicit visual iconic resemblance to their referents. Identity is therefore associated with visual anonymity. Compared this to YouTube, where the identities formed through representations of the self are not visually anonymous in the videos since they contain a more direct iconic reference to the represented object. Many creators use a character name and withhold information about their real identities, as is the case with *The Shaytards*, which the frame grab from his channel shows[8]:



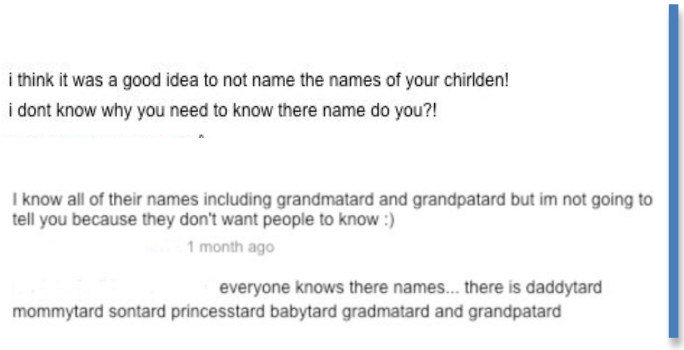
Frame grabs: *Shaytards' YouTube profile*

There is clearly a self-ironic distance to the YouTube standard profile and it underlines the entertaining and subjective context that in which the videos of his everyday life must be regarded. But the self-irony simultaneously seems to build a filter of privacy, which again underlines the characteristic of the Vlog as a *controlled* performative self-presentation. Nonetheless, the photograph above still situates *Shay* as physically present and corresponds with the person in the videos. In most cases, the creator of first-person content is physically present in the video. The subject's appearance in the Vlog is not through an avatar nor transformed in any radical ways.

[8] This framegrab was taken June 9, 2011 from: http://www.youtube.com/user/SHAYTARDS?feature=chclk.

There are exceptions such as the famous Vlogger *Fred*, who has transformed his appearance by adding a helium effect to his voice. Another is the creative musical performer *MysteryGuitarMan,* who as part of his YouTube identity always wears sunglasses in his videos. Although they have transformed their physical appearance, they are not simulated characters like avatars or World of Warcraft (WOW) characters. And unlike *SecondLife* or the universe of *WOW*, people still present themselves in real settings. Most Vlogs are shot in domestic settings; i.e. living rooms, bedrooms, work places etc. They frequently involve family members and friends who all to some extent participate in the Vlog as real people, normally situated in their personal domestic settings. This also includes the performing outside character in the aforementioned video of *CTFxC,* who is also depicted as an ordinary person situated at the hotel where (we assume) she spends her holiday. The identities presented in the Vlogs are in that sense representations with a referential relationship towards the real world. This is perhaps most evident through the involvement of self-reflexivity when the Vlogger explicitly outlines the distinction between the performing self-image "me" and the private "I" as mentioned earlier. Through this distinction, the Vlogger clearly situates herself or himself in a mediated presentation of self and thereby fulfils a role and a profession as a Vlogger. This simultaneously creates a level of transparency in which spectators can distinguish between the self-images of a private "I" and a public Vlog-identity ("me"). It appears to be generally accepted that the Vlogs creates a somewhat staged and subjective representation of reality, but which does not replace the referential relation to the historical reality. The impression of authenticity ultimately depends on users' ability to make sense of the video as both a presentation and a representation drawing on experience with the historical reality.

In *The Shaytards* video *I Throw da babies*, Shay and his wife discuss whether or not to reveal the name of their daughter, also known as *Babytard*. It is interesting to see that many of the comments (see below) responding to the video show a general rationale and respect of privacy:



These comments also indicate that the users do not expect *The Shaytards'* version of reality to be objective or un-staged. From this perspective, despite that the everyday and social behaviours are situated in a somewhat staged setup with character-names similar to a sit-com, *The Shaytards* can still be regarded as authentic. An important feature is the fact that they are not trying to hide this information, as also stated by Michael Welsch; "you do not hide or pretend to be somebody else!" (Cf. Strangelove 2010, p. 64). This is underlined by the self-reflexivity and meta-layers that are integrated in most of the videos of *The Shaytards*. This is also the case with the example of *CTFxC*. During the video, Charles makes it clear that their holiday in Jamaica is a sponsored holiday paid by a camera company that wants them to advertise and film their Vlog using the company's camera. In that sense, the video communicates a transparency between the depicted world in the Vlog and the

surrounding environment that could have been left out of the Vlog. But by including these facts, it provides a layer of sincerity in terms of explaining their motivation for filming. Another example is a video of the popular Vlogger *PhillipDeFranco*. In the video *My YouTube Setup in Response to this Morning's BBC Article*, Phillip responds to a BBC article that reveals he is now shooting his videos in a studio setup simulating a private living room and that he now has 10 employees who work for him in order to produce his personal Vlog. When he started, he was a college student and is now a professional Vlogger. But his video is furthermore an example of the importance of authenticity, manifested in *PhillipDeFranco'*s consistent concern for being accused of deceiving his audience. He therefore makes the above-mentioned video in which he shows the studio setup and films his employees. He also reminds his viewers that the article was only written because he has no filter regarding his viewers, and thus is being sincere. He calls this "*AMA*; *Ask Me Anything!*" (0:53), as he occasionally answers questions from his viewers in the comments above; furthermore, the information obtained by the BBC for the article had been taken from these comments. Like the example of *The Shaytards* and *CTFxC*, this example also illustrates that an essential aspect for *PhillipDeFranco* is to communicate transparency and thereby authenticity.

Frame grab: *PhillipDeFranco: My YouTube Setup in Response to this Morning's BBC Article*

Rather than a question of fiction or non-fiction, it is just as much a question of providing the *impression* of the real. This aspect of authenticity is very much at stake in terms of whether a video is well received. This was earlier exemplified with the fake Vlog *Lonely Girl 15*, in which an actress pretended to be a 15-year old girl who was Vlogging about her personal problems. When it was revealed that the videos of the young girl were 'fake', i.e., made by professionals and the girl was an actress, it created an uproar within the YouTube community (Cf. Strangelove 2010, p. 64).

Spoofing the Vlog

The importance of authenticity can also be elaborated by a recent Danish example. One of the most discussed Danish attempts of viral marketing is the now-removed video *Danish Mother Seeking*. The video mimics the Vlog format with a first-person story of a woman, Karen (played by a Danish actress), who is looking for the father of her child:

Frame grab*: Karen 26 Pay-off (since the original video has been removed)*

The video was not completely a commercial failure, since it received a lot of traffic (the video was among "the most viewed this week" in 2009), but it got its attention for the wrong reasons and the producers somewhat misunderstood the ways of communicating on YouTube. Admittedly, the picture behind the women says "AD", supposedly referring to the video being an advertisement. Without providing clues that it was a spoof, it showed a representation of reality that was fake or an example of what Burgess and Green refer to as "inauthentic authenticity" (2009, p. 29) and what Gilmore and Pine call "*Fake-real*" (2007, p. 97). Although quickly removed, the video received many "dislikes" and negative comments that were related to the fact that it was a fake.

Rumour-based navigation

This example demonstrates that the referential relationship towards reality cannot solely be determined through form and content, but also involves other contexts. *Danish Mother Seeking*, through its imitation of a Vlog, signals authenticity, i.e., first-person camera, the physical presence of Karen in her domestic setting (we are together with Karen in her living room) and her self-presentation that situates her as a real person. In that sense, the video clearly uses codes that, in regards to the Vlog and audience's experience with traditional forms of non-fiction, would likely be considered authentic. And when a video like *Danish Mother Seeking* does not provide any "clues", the spectator would most likely identify the video as non-fiction.

In regards to traditional television content, the identification of content is normally performed by the presence of an institutional regulation that would help us identify content (cf. Nichols 1991). On YouTube there is no regulating authority that informs the spectators whether the video they are watching is a spoof. Instead, identification of content on YouTube relies on users' ability to navigate through meta-data. Donath and Boyd argue that a social network with a high degree of interaction creates trust and understanding among people, because it for example exposes frauds and hoaxes through what they define as the "social mechanism of reputation" (2004, p. 73). This means that, e.g., a rumour or a hoax spreads faster in a shared community. In regards to YouTube, this mechanism can be recognised in the use of comments or through links from other social networks like Twitter. The fact that *Danish Mother Seeking* was a hoax spread through the comments below the video, where viewers could read that it was a fake. A user connected to a certain channel or one who participates through reading comments is therefore more likely to get verification about the video than a person who just watches the video without reading comments or linking to the channel of the creator. The user-community in regards to navigation and reception therefore is of much importance. Another aspect of this is the process of detecting a fraud. As also touched upon by Burgess and Green, some users seem to take on the role as a detective in order to expose frauds (2009, p. 29) and in that sense reception involves a ludic perspective, which also

draws a parallel to the popularity of virals on YouTube and can be found in a great deal of fan media.

The rumour-based navigation also underlines the existence of a social dimension that despite an increasing commercialisation of UGC is still relevant, and it draws attention to users' abilities to navigate through content as well as its meta-communicative layers.

Conclusions

Vlogs are regarded as first-person videos that primarily contain personal and private reflections. But the taxonomic understanding of the term identified among the most popular content of YouTube also involves personal issues, which are placed in a much more staged, performative and entertaining context. It has been argued that the development of the Vlog is influenced by the technological properties of YouTube and must therefore also be regarded as a part of the ongoing evolutionary form of online communication. This has moreover been demonstrated by its continuing transformation into a more subjective and performative mode of self-representation that distinguishes it from previous forms of audiovisual self-presentation.

The Vlog was founded as a grass-roots movement and as a social network platform where users were encouraged to create Vlogs in creative environments and direct user-interaction in which the main motivation is to interact with other Vloggers. This is still a central issue of the Vlog, as well as other types of UGC on YouTube; but the Vlog, manifested as one of the most popular forms of UGC on YouTube, has gradually moved into a mass-media environment in which the network ideology and UGC as a market-orientated business model have somewhat merged. Social interaction therefore must be regarded just as much as a strategic marketing tool. This does not mean that interaction between users is not at stake, on the contrary (exemplified by the large degree of phatic communication among users); but it means that the often-quoted assumption that since the Vlog is inherently interactive and that the main motivation for Vlogging is to interact with other Vloggers (cf. Warmbrodt et al. 2008, p. 1) are in need of modification, since today's Vlogger on YouTube is just as much a professional media producer. The Vlog must therefore be regarded in the vacillation between commercial interest that has formed a competitive environment and the social norms of the site fostering socialisation. In between this co-existence, the audiovisual presentations of the self are characterised as a cultural commodity, where authenticity and the self is constantly performed.

With this cultural commodification of the self, the question of authenticity represents an underlying paradox in the consumption of much contemporary culture, where the audience wants to be entertained, but at the same time wants to watch people situated in their real lives to provide this entertainment through their everyday experiences. This balance can be formulated as the ability to perform an impression of authenticity. The Vlogs on YouTube indicate that authenticity can appear in a performative and more staged form as long as the creator communicates openness. This characterises the Vlog as a mediated self-representation that is constructed through the subject's interaction and influence on the medium platform, but as simultaneously presented and consumed with the referential relationship to reality. It has been argued that it also involves self-reflexivity, which shifts the focus to the distinction between the private "I" and the mediated "me".

References

Bruzzi, S. (2001). *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction,* London: Routledge.

Buckingham**,** D. (2009). A commonplace art? Understanding Amateur Media Production. In D. Buckingham & R. Willet (ed.). *Video Cultures* (pp.23-50). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Burgess, J. & J. Green (2009). *YouTube, Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Carlson, M. (1996). *Performance: A critical introduction*, Routledge, London.

Carroll, N. (2003). *Engaging the Moving Image.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Chalfen, R. (1987). *Snapshot Versions of Life.* Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Couldry, N. (2009) Digital Storytelling, media research and democracy. In K Lundby (ed.): *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories: self-representations in new media*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Donath, J. and D. Boyd (2004). Public displays of connection. *BT Technology Journal,* 22 *(4)*, 71-82.

Dovey, J. (2000). *Freakshow, First Person Media and Factual Television*. London: Pluto Press.

Gilmore, J.& J. Pine (2007). *Authenticity: What consumers really want.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Goffman, E. (1959/1990). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Penguin Books

Hartley, J. (2009) Uses of YouTube – Digital Literacy and the Growth of Knowledge. In J. Burgess and J. Green (Eds.) *YouTube, Online Video and Participatory Culture* (pp.126-143). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hjarvad**,** S. (2002). Simulated conversations – The Simulation of Interpersonal Communication in Electronic Media. In A. Jerslev (ed.): *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media* (pp. 227-252). Copenhagen: Northern Lights, Museum Tusculanum Press.

Henderson, J. (2009) Handing over Control? Access, ordinary people, and Video Nation. In D. Buckingham & R. Willet (Eds.) *Video Cultures* (pp.152-171). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Herring, S.C., L. A. Scheidt; E. Wright & S. Bonus (2005): Weblogs as a bridging genre. In *Information Technology & People vol.* 18 *(2)*, 142-171.

Huffaker, D.A. and Calvert, S.L (2005). Gender, Identity, and Language Use in Teenage Blogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication,* 10 *(2).* Retrieved September 2011: http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue2/huffaker.html

Jenkins, H. (2006) *Convergence Culture*, New York: N.Y. University Press.

Jensen, K. B. (2010). *Media Convergence: The Three Degrees of Network, Mass and Interpersonal Communication.* London: Routledge**.**

Kilborn, R. (2003). *Staging the Real*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lambeth, J. (2010). *Digital Storytelling – Cookbook*. Berkeley, CA: Digital Dinner Press.

Lange, P. (2007). Publicly private and privately public: Social networking on YouTube. *In Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13*(1)*,1-18. Retrieved May 2011:http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/lange.html

Lange, P. (2009). *Videos of Affinity on YouTube.* In P. Snickars & P. Vonderau (Eds.) *The YouTube Reader* (pp. 70-88). Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

Leadbeater, C. and P. Miller (2004). *The Pro-am Revolution.* London: Demos

Luers, W. (2007). Cinema without show business: A poetics of Vlogging. Retrieved June 16 2011, from http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.pid9999.0005.105.

Lundby, K. (2008) (ed.). *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories: self-representations in new media*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society – From the standpoint of a social behaviourist*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No Sense of Place* London: Oxford University Press.
Miles, A. (2003). Softvideography. *Cybertext yearbook 2002-2003*. Retrieved June 2011: http://cybertext.hum.jyu.fi/index.php?browsebook=2
Molyneaux, H., S. O'Donnell, K. Gibson & J. Singer (2008). Exploring the gender Divide on YouTube. *The American Communication Journal*, 10 *(2),* 1-14.
Nichols, B. (1991). *Representing Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Ong, W. J (1982). *Orality and Literacy – The Technologizing of the Word*. London & New York: Methuen.
Rasmussen, T.A. Social mening og viden på sociale sites. In H.J. Nielsen, and D. H. Christensen (Eds.) *Nye Vidensmedier: Kultur, læring kommunikation* (pp.117-135). Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.
Scannell, P. (1996). *Radio, Television & Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Strangelove, *M. (2010*). *Watching YouTube - extraordinary videos by ordinary people.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Tapscott, D (2009). *Grown up Digital*. New York: McGraw Hill.
Thompson, J. B. (1995) .*The Media and Modernity, A social theory of the media.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
Thompson, J. B (2005). The New Visibility. *Theory, Culture & Society* 22 (*6): 31-51.*
Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the Screen. Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
van Dijck, J. (2009). Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media Culture Society*, 31 *(1),* 41-58.
Ward, Paul (2005) *Documentary - the Margins of Reality*. London: Wallflower.
Warmbrodt, J., H. Sheng, and R. Hall (2008). Social Network Analysis of Video Bloggers. Paper presented at the 41st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences.

.....

The performative way of YouTube

Abstract

The focus of this article is online identity formation and social behaviour in YouTube videos, more specifically user-generated content (UGC), advocating a theoretical framework of performative theory. Through this primarily theoretical approach, I discuss how it is possible to identify the constitution of the self within UGC content and especially in audiovisual first-person presentations.

One starting point for the analysis is Erving Goffman's micro-sociological approach to social performances and a discussion of this within a mediated context. For this reason, Joshua Meyrowitz' adaptation of Goffman in a mediated context also proves useful in regards to YouTube. Following this approach, the article demonstrates how specific social behaviour takes place within the videos.

Furthermore, the article discusses whether we can consider the constitution of identity as a construction of the subject, as most notably argued by Judith Butler on the theoretical grounds of J. L. Austin and Jacques Derrida. The article argues that an explicit integration of self-reflexivity and meta-communication challenges the constructivist perspective and suggests that this perspective must also be extended to involve, e.g., authenticity and transparency as fundamental criteria of successful presentations of oneself on YouTube.

Introduction

YouTube is a media platform that distributes forms of audiovisual self-presentations, or what in the following I will address as a specific mode of user-generated content (UGC), the so-called Vlogs, to an extent previous media have not experienced. This presentation of the self is especially noticeable in regards to the Vlogs, first-person presentations as audiovisual monologues created to attract a responding audience. This characterises the videos as something "in between"; they are neither staged theatrical expressions nor reproductions of real life. Many of the videos on YouTube can be considered everyday displays of the self that are created through the use of emerging new technology. The camera (embodied in cell phones and small pocket cameras) has itself become an everyday cultural device for self-display that provides the individual with new possibilities of mobility and immediacy. This article is concerned with audiovisual presentations of the self as performative acts, and through such a perspective we can identify the videos not just as creative acts, but as forms of creating online identity through sounds and images. The act of creating a statement with the use of a video camera is an act of constituting oneself within the community of YouTube. The community of YouTube, however, is not so much about confessions and presentations of intimacy as it is the display of the self – not through strong emotional behaviour, sentimentality or intimate self-biographies, but rather through hedonistic everyday behaviour.

In most cases of Vlogs, which are the main analytical focus of this article, performative social behaviour appears in an often monologue-based presentation by an individual, who is communicating to an undisclosed public audience. The recording and publishing of the self on YouTube would not happen in this specific

way if there were not an audience waiting to reply. This makes the content on YouTube an interesting case of self-presentation.

Although YouTube is rightfully being associated with user-participation, as most noticeably investigated by Burgess and Green (2009), YouTube is also very much about presenting the self, which involves the issues of recognition and identity formation that on YouTube are linked to visibility. Visibility is created through performances of the self in terms of actions. You gain visibility by presenting yourself in a performative way. As Anne Jerslev and Rune Gade, following Butler, have stated in their introduction to the anthology *Performative Realism*:

> This constitution of identity must be visible (…) Becoming a subject depends not only on being recognized and acknowledged but every bit as much on being *seen doing* (2005a: 7).

Although written just before the launch of YouTube, the description of the subject in terms of visibility provides us with an indication and explanation of the emergence and popularity of, e.g., UGC on YouTube.

This article will investigate how identity, as associated with visibility, can be observed as a specific mode of social behaviour within the content of videos that primarily entail explicit first-person presentations of the self, such as Vlogs. The article will argue that a great number of self-presentations can fruitfully be regarded as mediated performative acts, of which the article will seek to investigate the specific characteristics.

The focus will initially be on performative behaviour in regards to YouTube. This will include the theoretical framework of Erving Goffman (1959) as well as Joshua Meyrowitz (1985). These theories will be applied to selected cases of UGC and they will enable an identification of the performative as social behaviour taking place within the videos. The article further will involve the linguistic framework of J. L Austin, as adapted by Judith Butler, and applied in a discussion of UGC and the construction of identities that do not exist beyond the presence of the camera and the platform of YouTube. The article has no intention of generalising regarding the content of YouTube, but simply to argue that by applying a performative theoretical framework, it is possible to gain meaningful knowledge about the social behaviour and how audiovisual identity is constituted within the site and more specifically found within UGC and Vlogs.

The article draws on selective case studies of Vlogs found within the most popular content (in terms of views, ratings and discussions).

Understanding performances

The concept of performativity involves many complex perspectives discussed within several disciplines including: sociology, anthropology, theatre studies, linguistics, gender studies as well as cultural studies. The complexity, however, already begins with the question of etymology. A performance can be understood as an aesthetic display of skills and as a specific form of staged acting, as well as ritual behaviour involving religious rituals (e.g., baptisms), cave art, folkloric storytelling and Ancient Greek philosophers' public performances (cf. Schechner 2006: 221 pp.). This

understanding of the term performance has most notably been adopted by the so-called "performance studies", first and foremost introduced by Richard Schechner (e.g., 2003, 2006) and Erin Striff (2003). Performance studies has its origin in theatre studies (cf. Bal 2002) and the approach is therefore explicitly concerned with the transformed behaviour of people when they appear on "a stage".

A performance can simultaneously be understood as social behaviour and social actions in everyday life. The theorists involved in performance studies also acknowledge this understanding of performance. They primarily draw on Erving Goffman's micro-sociological depiction of the everyday life in which he uses theatre and role-playing as metaphors for social behaviour (1959).

There are therefore at least two distinctions of a performance, one focussing on an aesthetic-orientated emphasis on skills and one understood as an action that takes place in our social and cultural life, as also underlined by Marvin Carlson:

> So we have two rather different concepts of performance; one involving the display of skills, the other involving display, but less of particular skills than of a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behaviour (1996: 4-5).

The display of skills is evident on YouTube in the many musical performances, stand-up videos, computer game videos, and "how to" videos as well as in creative and artistic videos. These types of videos enclose the traditional staged performance as an act of skilfulness that can be bridged to folkloric cultures of performing a tale orally, theatre traditions and musical performances. It is furthermore possible to add that an artistic performance is more likely to involve an intentional aspect, while the performative role being adapted in everyday life may also appear unintended and conventional. As I shall return to later, the conventional meaning of a performance has most noticeably been discussed by Austin in his study of performative speech acts, from which Jacques Derrida and Butler have developed their theories of performativity.

Finally, Jon McKenzie refers to a third meaning of a performance, a contextual one that involves an action of a successful accomplishment, e.g., related to performance at work or a sexual performance in bed. The lack of a successful performance may lead to a social downfall, as pointed out by Anne Jerslev and Rune Gade in *Performative Realism* (2005a: 8). McKenzie describes this dependence on performative success in his book *Perform or Else*, in which he links social and cultural performances with an organisational mode of performance (cf. 2001: 9).

McKenzie extends the types of performance discussed so far with the efficiency of performing, and how public institutions define the criteria of this efficiency. This means that, for example, when a YouTuber performs a social role according to certain expectations, at the same time he or she receives recognition based on his or her performance as a YouTuber, which is measured by the efficiency of the performance.

In that sense, a performance on YouTube involves two aspects: performance as social behaviour and performance as a paradigm of efficiency. This also underlines the before-mentioned need for visibility, emerging from the institutional organisation of YouTube, which is fundamentally based on commercial interest.

A successful display of performative behaviour measured through visibility on YouTube therefore also can be regarded as an overall *skill* of YouTubing. That is, for example, mastering the skill of Vlogging or in general the mastery of creating promoted content. This is very much the case on YouTube, which is organised around the content's visibility in the sense that the most popular content on YouTube is visible to us in terms of the actions of an audience, who with their subscriptions, ratings, viewings and discussions decide whether or not a specific video receives visibility. Consequently, a video is constantly at risk of a free fall, in terms of a lack of visibility. A poor performance on YouTube can therefore be can therefore be the cause of a non-online existence.

Hence, according to McKenzie, the possibility of a precipitous social downfall on YouTube in that sense would be the result of negative feedback from the users. Performativity therefore, as also underlined by Marvin Carlson, must involve the consciousness of performing for somebody: "Performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as a performance" (1996: 5-6).

Social performances

In the following, we will focus our attention on the specific role that creators of UGC take on in their videos. As demonstrated by Meyrowitz (1985), Erving Goffman's theory on social behaviour can usefully be expanded to involve mediated behaviour as well, although Goffman bases his arguments on face-to-face interactions. It is therefore also possible to use Goffman's theory to describe the construction and presentation of the self on YouTube. A video in which a person places her or himself in front of a camera does this in a certain way that will leave an impression on an audience watching the video, although there may be different intentions for doing so (socialising, self-promotion, display of skills etc.). This way of behaving in front of the camera is a specific type of performance of the self. Goffman proposes a view of the self as something performed, stating that everything is about "impression management" (1959: 203), as the performer is required to be "successfully staging a character" (ibid.).

Goffman's major work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990/1959) investigates how people in everyday life present themselves and their actions – and not least how they appear "in front of others" (cf. 1959: 26). One of Goffman's main arguments is that an individual in a social setting wants to maintain a specific identity in the social setting and thus always wants to make a certain impression on the other people who are present:

> When an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey (ibid.: 15-16).

This impression needs to be sustained through different techniques that Goffman identifies as dramaturgical techniques. One of these techniques is performance. As Goffman famously states: "A performance may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants*"* (ibid.: 27). A performance, therefore, according to Goffman, is not

a unique phenomenon taking place on a stage, but something that takes place in all aspects and situations of social life.

Goffman stresses that this relationship is fundamentally unbalanced, since the impression, which the speaker intends to give, can be both conscious and unconscious and the performer is therefore not necessarily in control of how a performance is perceived by a spectator. This eventually results in asymmetry between the performer and the spectator:

> In this a fundamental asymmetry is demonstrated in the communication process, the individual presumably being aware of only one stream of his communication process, the witness of this stream and one other (ibid.: 19).

As an audience, we are not only aware of the performer's intentional utterances, but we are also aware of little gestures, mimicry, which a spectator or a listener, according to Goffman, finds easier to see through than the performer finds it to hide. In that sense, the success of a performance is thus related to the ability to communicate an impression of authenticity. The behaviour discussed here is per se mediated since it takes place in an audiovisual discourse that, despite being mere registrations and observations, is a specific type of behaviour influenced by the presence of a camera. And in a mediated communication situation, for instance on YouTube, the asymmetric balance is different. In reality programmes such as *Big Brother* or *Survivor*, producers and television stations are in control. They usually take advantage of this control and expose the unconscious behaviour of the performers (i.e., strong emotional behaviour). On YouTube, in contrast, we experience (similar to home movies or Facebook) that the creator is in control of the performances being communicated and published.

Consequently there are very few unintentional or uncontrolled performances. The closest examples we find of Goffman's non-mediated performances are situations where the camera is not turned off or where the content is unedited. On the Internet, there have been examples of this phenomenon. One example is audiovisual "life-casting", which implies a live transmission, like the life of Jennifer Ringley in *JenniCam* (1996-2003), without the possibility of editing the content. In most cases on YouTube, the creator is in control. In the depictions of personal everyday life, like in the videos of *CTFxC*, *The Shaytards*, *ShaneDawsonTV* or *PhillipDeFranco*, they are always in control of what is being published.

Goffman argues that social behaviour takes place in a vacillation between two spheres: the private space of the family ("back region"; ibid.: 114) and the public space of the work place and social institutions ("front region"; ibid.: 109).

When reality television is analysed, it is frequently argued that everything has become public (see, e.g., Kilborn 2003: 89 ff.). Similarly, in regards to UGC, we also see examples of how these two regions have merged. Meyrowitz has illustrated how this is also the case with television, which provides increased access to private back-regions. He introduced the term "Middle Region", which describes the merging of the private and public self in which the lines between traditional back and front regions have moved:

> Middle Region behaviour develops when audience members gain a "sidestage" view. That is, they see parts of the traditional back-stage area: they see the performer move from backstage to onstage to backstage (1985: 47).

Meyrowitz describes the "Middle Region" as a "sidestage" view in the sense that we see what happens both behind and on stage. Using this understanding of Middle Region behaviour, specific UGC that depict various forms of a first-person's everyday life and social behaviour are per se examples of Middle Region behaviour, since they are the deliberate public presentations of private and personal identities.

On television, this view is most often created by media institutions. They choose to introduce their viewers to the participant's back region area, which thereby turns into Middle Region behaviour in order to dramatise reality. If we briefly return to the question of control, this relationship changes with the emergence and dominance of the Middle Region area. Meyrowitz argues that: "The less performers can control and restrict other's access to themselves, however, the more back region behaviour must come into light" (1985: 48). This could be illustrated with the example of "life-casting", where creators turn on their cameras and from that point on have no control of the public access. Another example is *Big Brother*, in which participants voluntarily expose themselves to the control of the camera. On the contrary, on YouTube, the YouTuber and self-presenter are in control.

A creator such as Shay, from the YouTube Vlog-series *The Shaytards*, allows access to himself and his family, but it is not full access. Since November 2008, he has shown scenes from his everyday life and family. Each video is around 13 minutes of selected footage of their daily life. Shay exclusively selects the footage and therefore users can access a relatively small perspective of the family's private life. It is thus also likely that we will not see many examples of what Meyrowitz refers to as "damaging back stage information" (ibid.: 49), since the creator has the possibility of leaving this out of the finished video. As Meyrowitz also argues, the "Middle-Region area" opens up for the emergence of new back and front areas. The so-called "deep-back" region and "forefront" regions result from "more extreme versions of behaviour" (ibid.: 50), since they are more isolated than the "Middle-Region" area. In practice, this means that representations within the Middle-Region area generally lack the strong depiction of intimacy and strong emotional behaviour, because in the Middle Region, the back region behaviour always involves a bias of front region behaviour. A good example of this is the video *DOG SH*T Diaries (Day 08)* made by *PhillipDeFranco*. He tries to lose weight and openly reflects upon what he should show and not show. *PhillipDeFranco* is in control of his videos and explains why he chooses not to film something that he feels is too private: "People are asking, why I don't film my exercises…(…)… there is a lot of fat moving (…) and I am very self-conscious so I will not show this part" (00:38). This potential scene of deep-back stage behaviour is excluded because the creator is in control. "Deep-back region behaviour" would include following people without any emotional filters and revealing uncontrollable affective behaviour. This type of behaviour does not seem likely to take place since the creator has the possibility of leaving these elements out.

It is therefore noticeable when videos include what we could consider examples of deep backstage. One now famous example of this is the video *Leave Britney Alone* created by Chris Croker. He shows strong emotional behaviour in front of the camera in an affective defence of Britney Spears. Whether Croker reveals sincere emotional

behaviour shall not be determined here. Many viewers have discussed the authenticity of Croker's behaviour and many accuse him of a rehearsed, simulated deep-back space, as a promotional strategy or an example of what Goffman refers to as "cynical performance" (1959: 28). This lack of sincerity is implied by the large number of negative comments asking "is this guy for real", and by the fact that with 74% dislikes of the video, as well as the fact that through his video Croker has become famous and managed to establish himself as a YouTube celebrity selling music on iTunes and merchandise from his homepage, indicate a certain calculation of visibility. This example also raises the question of how to make sense of YouTube when the issue of sincerity is constantly blurred with the necessity to perform, as I shall return to later.

Performance in the Vlog

The establishment of a Middle Region space furthermore can be elaborated by comparing two examples of Vlogging. The first example is evident in the videos of *Pogobat*, or Dan Brown as he refers to himself in the videos. Brown's video *In search of a new dishwasher* is about what he did the day before. We see him taking a shower, shaving and uploading a video to YouTube. He also intends to buy a new dishwasher and this everyday and rather trivial action becomes the narrative drive for the video. What we see in the video are small aspects of Dan's everyday life. It is not his deep-back space in the sense that we do not see him naked, getting dressed, sitting on the toilet or what happens when he decides not to film inside of a dishwasher store where he is most likely maintaining a front region role. It is a selective and biased presentation of Dan's personal life, as he wants us to see it and how he tells it via a diary form with an added voiceover. The pictures serve as illustrations and documentation of his voiceover, showing Dan presumably taking a shower and making a sandwich; these might just as well be recordings he made as reconstructions of yesterday's ritual activities. It seems plausible that this is how Dan would behave. But at the same time is it highly unlikely he would make funny faces and weird sounds when working on the video in the editing program or scream and sing loudly while doing the dishes if these actions were not serving the purpose of being published to an audience. In that sense, actions can be coined as performative that mime back-region behaviour and become an example of controlled Middle-Region behaviour. These actions take place in this mediated form due to the presence of a camera and a self-expressed role as a Vlogger. Dan's video moreover illustrates how trivial everydayness merges with the public front-region behaviour that serves an audience and is explicitly performative.

Dan's intention to film inside of the store fails. He admits he feels uncomfortable filming his interaction with the sales clerks working in the dishwasher shop, as he states: "*Filming in public places is awkward*"(2:43). In this situation, Dan needs to take on a role that demands only front-region behaviour. In most parts of the video, Dan takes on his middle region role that merges the private intimate with the controlling front-region behaviour; but when he is outside in public, he takes on a more traditional front role because it is a new behavioural situation. The change of situation can perhaps explain why Dan feels filming in public is awkward, because it results in a different performative behaviour, as also stated by Meyrowitz: "The distance between situations contributes to the degree of separation in behavioural style" (1985: 51). Dan only shows parts of his personal everyday life, primarily filming himself and his family within domestic situations. It is therefore a change of

situation when Dan is outside of the domestic setting, where it appears to be difficult for him to maintain his Middle-Region behaviour in public.

Nonetheless, there are many examples of how the change of settings and situations do not seem to affect the role of the performer. In most of the videos of *The Shaytards*, we see how the settings might change from being depictions of the family in a rather intimate and private domestic situation to include public behaviour. In the video *Fighting with my wife about pools in Walmart,* Shay is in Walmart with his family, where they do not have any problems filming their private behaviour in public. The difference between *The Shaytard*s and Dan is that Shay has taken on a more public front role of a Vlogger that legitimates (or even demands) that he films all situations. Another difference is that *The Shaytards* automatically bridges the domestic situation of depicting family life and the action of going to Walmart, by bringing his children and wife to the store, and interacts with them in the store rather than the employees, as is the case for Dan. Shay creates a continuum of domestic behaviour and presents a stronger form of front-region control and less focus on the private, which makes it easier for him to maintain the same behavioural role in both situations. Shay has adopted an explicit role as a Vlogger that enables him to maintain his performative role in practically all situations. Arguably this role is solely legitimate through the mediating role of the camera. If Shay was not filming his actions in public, they would most likely not take place, since the actions are fundamentally actions performed for the camera, and thereby for the audience; and if they did take place without the camera, they would most likely be considered inappropriate. One example is when Shay throws a ball around in the shop, which his children run after, or placing one of the children on the top shelf. These actions are legitimated in terms of the presence of the camera, which turns their behaviour into a performance. The video, however, also contains reflections upon being in public; the mother, "MummyTard", admits to being too shy to show her pregnant abdomen inside the store, as she somewhat plays "out of her performative character" by revealing a type of traditional back-space behaviour.

The impression of authenticity

Authenticity is here understood as the ability to provide an authentic impression of the self in a specific situation for a public audience. As argued earlier, the creator is in control of the video that thus becomes a biased and edited version of private life. It is therefore also an edited and, in many situations, staged reality that is presented in the video and therefore a representation of reality presented by a performative subject. As Meyrowitz argues, an audience does not expect nor is interested in seeing everything, but the specific (in this case YouTube) version of the self:

> Further, the staging of a front region does not necessarily involve "fooling audience", because to a large extent, audiences want only a limited version of the performer (ibid.: 30-31).

This means that we expect a Vlogger, for example, to perform a certain role that follows the norms of mediated behaviour in front of the camera. It therefore seems natural that Dan Brown burst into singing while doing the dishes. Although it leaves the impression of being staged, it does not mean Dan's video is fiction. What Dan shows is his real life and his real family in his non-fictional domestic setting. He stages himself in front of the camera but he does not transform himself into another

character. Goffman uses the term "impression of reality" (1959: 28), which refers to the subject's own belief in whether the performance is real or not. Goffman poses two extremes, one that includes the absolute belief in truth, which on YouTube is well-illustrated in how many videos include a self-reflexive layer, revealing that the video is in fact a construction and thereby strengthening the impression of sincerity in terms of communicating transparency.

The other extreme is the cynical performance, as discussed earlier, in regards to YouTuber Chris Croker. A concrete example of a "cynical" performance would be so-called fake videos that adopt a certain impression of reality, but are something else. This was the case with *LonelyGirl15*, which staged an autobiographical Vlog of a young girl, and created a collective outburst within the community, when it was revealed everything was a setup. YouTubers, as argued, in many ways are conscious about how to perform in front of the audience, which is thus not expected to be a true presentation of reality, but a staged version. But at the same time, a fundamental issue of social behaviour, according to Goffman, is that the speaker needs to be convinced of the sincerity of the performance. Dan may very well stage his everyday life, but if he is not Dan Brown presenting himself, or his family members are actors, it would be a delusion. A great deal of content on YouTube communicates sincerity that is presented in a somewhat staged setting of performing, but rather than fiction, it is consumed and measured by its reliance on non-fiction. This has resulted in a fundamental paradox that demands creators to be performative and stage themselves, while at the same time they need to be authentic and sincere. This paradox is also mentioned by Paddy Scannell in regards to sincerity:

> Sincerity involves a performative paradox. If a person's behaviour is perceived by others as a performance, it will be judged to be insincere, for sincerity presupposes, as its general condition, the absence of performance (1996: 58).

Sincerity, as Scannell argues, is a fundamental expectation of ordinary everyday life. It is a way of being genuine. Since most of the videos examined here are presentations of everyday life, sincerity seems to be a somewhat expected ideal of the social behaviour within the videos. Anne Jerslev also refers to Scannell's paradox in her article on documentary performativity: "Therefore, it is paradoxical that sincerity (…) is a question of being able to maintain a particular impression of sincerity before an audience" (2005b: 86). As Jerslev states, it is very much about creating an impression of sincerity, where the audience seems to accept the paradox as long as you do not try to hide this fact. Or as Michael Strangelove has stated about YouTube: "The strongest critique is to say that you're hiding behind something or you're not being real" (2010: 64). Arguably this paradox is not limited to YouTube, but rather reflects a fundamental vacillation of two modes of communication: presentation (the performance of the self) and representation (the referential meaning of the presentation). On YouTube, the interesting issue is how the meta-commenting and paratextual layers make this relationship explicit and how it thus becomes a noticeable part of the content, as will be elaborated on later.

A final element for providing a sense of authenticity in a video is perhaps also the involvement of a meta-level, a focus on the process of making videos. Many of the first-person presentations (e.g., the videos of *Pogobat*, *The Shaytards*, *PhillipDeFranco* or *CTFxC*) include scenes of editing, self-reflexive comments that reveal why the performer chooses to film this and why he or she is behaving in this

specific way. This addition seems to support Strangelove's statement that the strongest critique you can receive as a YouTuber is the accusation of not being sincere. The addition of a self-reflexive layer functions as a catalyst of transparency underlining that the performing subject is a real person who is making an audiovisual video of him- or herself.

Performativity as a constitution of the self

The focus so far has been on the different roles creators adopt in their videos with regards to Goffman's sociological approach and Meyrowitz' media-sociological approach. Their theories of performative behaviour as social actions and reflections on everyday life have been applied to YouTube, suggesting a concrete relationship between the text and the historical and social reality surrounding these texts. What has not been discussed so far is the question of an ontological construction of the self within the process of creating content on YouTube. The last part of the article will elaborate on the performative behaviour of the self, by looking into how the self is constructed and whether we can consider this self as constructed within the audiovisual content, separating it from the outside contexts.

In the following, this aspect will be elaborated on in regards to a discussion on performativity, which takes its original starting point from the field of linguistics. The concept of performativity has its origin from J.L. Austin, who published *How to do things with words* (1975). Sentences like "*I name this ship….*" or "*I do take this woman…*" at a wedding ceremony involve not only a statement, but, according to Austin, also a performative speech act and a specific action (1975: 6).

Austin could not sufficiently distinguish between the performative utterance and the constative utterance, because uttering a constative is somewhat also a performance (ibid.: 94). Austin therefore elaborated on his understanding of a performative utterance and identified the performative speech act as an "illocutionary" act, separating it from two other speech acts, the referential "locutionary" and a "perlocutionary" (the effect or consequence of the speech act). By involving three simultaneous speech acts, Austin becomes capable of distinguishing properly between the constative and performative utterance. The performative or illocutionary statement is unlike the two other acts, according to Austin it is overtly conventional (ibid.: 128). By associating a performance with the conventional, a central issue of Austin's understanding of the performative utterance is that it is not regarded as something true or false, but rather whether it successfully takes place or not, ultimately depending on the social and institutional context. This bridges his theory with Goffman's understanding of the performative as determined by social actions and reflections of everyday day behaviour.

The construction of the self

Most notable, Jacques Derrida has advocated a deconstructivist approach to the performative, drawing on the theoretical grounds of Austin. For Derrida, it is the performative speech act's citational nature or what he defines as its "iterability" that turns a performative utterance into an action. For example, the act of naming a ship only becomes successful because it is a citation that refers to a recognisable list of already existing acts of naming ships. Derrida adapts the iterability that Austin considers a non-serious speech act, i.e., a fictional performance (Cf. Austin 1975: 22). Derrida at the same time downplays the importance of agency and its contextual

functionality as advocated by Austin. Instead, Derrida argues that the subject is also a construction based on quotation, as he poses the question on the importance of quotation in his essay *Signature Event Context*:

> Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable utterance (…) if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as *conforming* with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a citation (1988: 18) [Italics in original].

Quotation thereby becomes a construction of reality in which meaning is not something stable, but rather something process-related and transitory. This autonomy of meaning also implies that intention is absent, since a performative speech act can exist and be uttered without the speaker.

The most quoted and discussed adaptation of Austin's and Derrida's theory is Judith Butler's approach to gender, introduced in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990/2006). Butler proposes an understanding of the performative, adopting Derrida's concept of "iterability", and accordingly she argues that a performance is first and foremost constructed through repetitive practices: "Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual" (2006: xv). Hence, the performative act draws its force from quotation that is founded in already existing rituals and conventions.

Gender according to Butler is an act that is rehearsed and performed by the conditions of existing hegemonic conventions. Butler illustrates this in her other work *Bodies that Matter*, by using an example of an action of a judge who executes the law not as an act of subjective will, but by citing an already existing law:

> It is through the invocation of convention that the speech act of the judge derives its binding power (…) that binding power is to be found neither in the subject of the judge nor in his will, but in the citational legacy by which a contemporary "act" emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions (1993: 225).

The example provides a good description of Butler's overall point; that is, to use the concept of performativity to describe subjectivity not as an act or voluntarism, but to describe it as a proof of institutional determinism and a Foucault-inspired subversion of power (cf. Butler 2006: 183). This she exemplifies by society's suppressing role on, e.g., "queer-minorities". According to Butler, language, in terms of speech acts, possesses a constitutive dynamism that forms modes of identities such as gender and sexuality: "Gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing" (2006: 34). The subject is performatively constituting meaning in the process of doing, while he or she therefore does not exist outside of this action. The subject is in this sense a consequence of the process and not something that precedes it. According to Derrida and Butler, the performative utterance only exists in terms of the performative "doing" that thus becomes a re-doing, where the question of whether the actual takes place or not becomes irrelevant. As Butler states, this excludes any pre-existing identity in turns of gender:

> If gender attributes and acts (…) are performative, then there is no pre-existing identity by which an act or attribute might be measured (…) and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as true fiction (Butler 2006: 192).

If we apply this to YouTube, an act of doing can be juxtaposed with the act of filming. An act of filming, as for example expressed in the action of Vlogging, is a performative act, a doing in an Austinan sense. To say "I am Vlogging" implies the action of turning on the camera and starting to film. Accordingly, the version of the reality presented in front of us would not be there without the camera. The Vloggers would not do the things they do if there was not a camera or an audience to perform for. This is the case in the video *JAMAICAN ME CRAZY!* by *CTFxC*. *CTFxC* is the channel name of a couple, Charles and Alli. They are part of YouTube's Partner Programme and they are therefore paid for making videos. In this video, they are going to Jamaica on holiday. They clearly establish a sense of presence in the first frame of the video: "Good morning Internet, so we are on our way to Jamaica, just checking in right now" (00:00-00:03). What we see takes place in the present, and it takes place as a consequence of filming. This is underlined by the fact that the reason they are going on a holiday is because they are going to make a sponsored video by a camera company that paid them to go on holiday and film. In that sense, the representational frame of this video is somewhat different from, e.g., an observational holiday home movie that would have taken place anyway. *CTFxC*'s motivational behaviour is linked to the act of filming, thus creating a version of reality that only exists by the presence of the camera. The video therefore constructs an audiovisual identity that exists as an act of doing, a constructed self that challenges the concept of representation, since what takes place in the video would not take place without the presence of the camera.

The videos of *CTFxC* and *The Shaytards* could exemplify what Butler and especially Derrida advocate, that is, performative texts do no refer to the outside world, but construct their own world. However, what challenges this is the constant reflexive reminder that what we see is a construction. The meta-commenting layer where the creators comment on the video being made and the self-reflexivity establish a link to a pre-existing identity and a pro-filmic reality. In *JAMAICAN ME CRAZY!,* Charles and Alli are doing this by telling the audience that this is in fact a holiday movie, which a company paid them to make. By making this explicit, it automatically re-installs the pre-existing subject, who is capable of reflecting on this notion and by the very reflection the constructed fictional world is bridged and explained in comparison with the existing reality outside the video.

All of *The Shaytards'* videos reflect on a similar need to reveal the natural form of the adapted and constructed role. Shay constantly reflects on the fact that his performative behaviour is in fact a role. Butler exemplifies the self-reflexive role in the adaptation of the drag role that imitates the structure of gender (ibid.: 187), but does not assume the existence of any original gender. In regards to YouTube, the reflexive aspect of the video is a fundamental element of Shay's videos and it seems clear that the construction of an online identity cannot successfully exist without its reference to the original subject behind, or at least a reference to the impression of the original subject. It can be argued that the success of *The Shaytards* strongly depends on the representation of reality. It is the awareness of an existing subject who performs the role of Shaytard. Shaytard adopts a self-reflexive role that calls attention to an existing gap between a referential subject and a performing subject, which articulates the aforementioned paradox of performing and simultaneously being authentic. This is also related to the importance of authenticity. You cannot hide or pretend to be something you are not. The reflexive dimension is therefore an overt tool to

communicate transparency, which bridges the relationship between the referential subject and the performative mediated subject within the videos. It is therefore problematic to consider the constitution of the subject without a pre-existing subject.

One interesting discussion surrounds the dynamics of identity formation within YouTube in regards to the changeability of the performative quotations. Both Derrida and Butler claim that the constitution of identity is not something stable, but rather dynamic and changeable. As Derrida states: "Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic (…), can…break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (1988: 79). A quotation is in this way never concrete. It is an on-going transformation that perhaps is most noticeable in the so-called Mashup culture in which creators build and create on already existing content that thus becomes an on-going transformation of creating content. Butler also argues that the possibility of transforming gender lies in the acts of dynamic and changeable repetition or the "parodic repetition" (2006: 192).

Another interesting discussion would examine whether this could take place deprived of the reflection and interaction with any pre-existing contexts beyond discourses (Goffman and Meyrowitz would maintain it could not). Without going into detail concerning this, it seems as if the structure of quotations that constructs the social behaviour and meaning on YouTube in regards to the specific content analysed here could not take place without the engagement and awareness of the community and paratextual information created in the perimeters of the concrete videos; i.e., comments which underline an interaction between the text and the outside world, and between the creator and the receiver (the audience), which is furthermore analogous to Gidden's notion of autobiographic and self-reflexive self.

Conclusion

This article has argued that social performances on YouTube are influenced by the criteria for success in which some YouTubers, with a need for visibility, have become aware of themselves as audiovisual public creators and subjects, which has affected how people present themselves. It has been argued that this can be characterised as a paradoxical co-existence of authenticity (in which audience members can mirror their own lives) as well as an adaptation of performative entertaining mode in which sincerity is blurred with hedonistic social behaviour. The theories of Goffman and Meyrowitz have proven useful for describing the existence of such a relationship and the online identity formation as a result of this. Although written in 1959, Goffman's overall point that individuals attempt to control impressions and therefore act in certain ways is highly relevant to YouTube, which as a media platform is an explicit example of "impression management". Here creators produce content for different motivational reasons, but are cohesive around the fact that a performance is always *for* somebody. By applying the performative approach by Goffman and Meyrowitz, we are able to observe how the self is presented on YouTube within the content and furthermore what affects it. It has been argued that some of the important criteria of presenting oneself reflect a balance between providing an impression of authenticity and at the same time adopting the conscious role of being entertaining. This has resulted in a somewhat paradoxical co-existence of the private and public, a "Middle Region" space of performative authenticity that is unique to YouTube in terms of the site's specific interface, accessibility and promotion of visibility.

By including Austin and Butler, it was furthermore possible to consider the act of performing as an initiated action itself that additionally, according to Butler, creates an identity. It is an interesting perspective that enables us to consider the performative behaviour within UGC as an example of constituting an online identity created by the presence of a camera and YouTube as a media platform. It is an identity that is specific to the media platform of YouTube communicated through audiovisuality. But it is also clear that to successfully communicate this identity to a public audience, the function of the physical and referentially situated subject must not be ignored. Many creators of UGC bridge their online identity with the real subjective "I" by creating a self-reflexive and meta-communicate layer in their videos. This layer may expose the video as a construction, but by doing this, the video simultaneously stresses the importance of transparency and thereby authenticity, which challenges the creation of online identity as an isolated post-structuralist self. However what at the same time seems beneficial is the suggestion of a co-existence between two forms of subjects, which results in the on-going identity formation of the video creator.

References

Austin, J.L. (1975). *How to do Things with Words - 2nd Ed*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Burgess, J. & J. Green (2009). *YouTube, Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Butler, J. (1990/2006). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* London: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that Matter – On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London: Routledge.

Carlson, M. (1996). *Performance: A critical introduction*, Routledge, London.

Derrida, J. (1988). *Limited INC.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Goffman, E. (1959/1990). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Penguin Books

Jerslev, A. & R. Gade (2005a). Introduction. In A. Jerslev & R. Gade (eds.) *Performative Realism* (pp. 7-18). Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press University of Copenhagen.

Jerslev, A. (2005b). Performativity and Documentary. In A. Jerslev & R. Gade (eds.) *Performative Realism* (pp. 85-116). Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press University of Copenhagen.

Kilborn, R. (2003). *Staging the Real*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

McKenzie, J. (2001). *Perform or Else*. London: Routledge.

Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No Sense of Place* London: Oxford University Press.

Scannell, P. (1996). *Radio, Television & Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Schechner, R. (2003). *Performance Theory*. London: Routledge.

Schechner, R. (2006) *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, London: Routledge.

Strangelove, M. *(2010). Watching YouTube - extraordinary videos by ordinary people.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Stiff, E.(2003) (ed.). *Performance Studies*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Written By
Thomas Mosebo Simonsen
Aalborg University
Department of Communication.

……